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JOSEPH RETINGER

Memoirs of an Eminence Grise

JOSEPH RETINGER

Memoirs of an Eminence Grise

Edited by

John Pomian

With a Foreword by

H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of
The Netherlands

SUSSEX
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1972

PUBLISHED BY
SUSSEX UNIVERSITY PRESS
AND DISTRIBUTED BY
CHATTO & WINDUS LTD
40 WILLIAM IV STREET
LONDON W.C.2
★
CLARKE, IRWIN & CO LTD
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ISBN 0 85621 002 1

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BUTLER & TANNER LTD, FROME AND LONDON

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Editor wishes to express his grateful thanks to the numerous persons who, in one way or another, have helped him to prepare ths book.

In particular he would like to record his gratitude to H.R.H. The Prince of the Netherlands for his Foreword; to Mrs Thelma Cazalet-Keir for permission to use excerpts from Major Victor Cazalet's reminiscences of his trip to Russia; to Mr Marek Celt for his vivid description of the take-off from occupied Poland; to J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd and the Trustees of the Joseph Conrad Estate for permission to quote Joseph Conrad's letter; to M. Denis de Rougemont for permission to quote from the brochure on Joseph Retinger published by the European Cultural Centre in Geneva.

He would also like to thank the European Cultural Foundation for their assistance in the publication of this book.

FOREWORD

By H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands

THROUGHOUT history there have been many outstanding figures who, during their lifetime, were at the focus of public attention. Some had admiration and honours lavished upon them; others were despised and rejected. Their names were familiar to all; and they left their stamp on the trends and events of their day.

But there have always been others – men whose influence was no less great, whose personalities left as deep a mark on their times, but who for all that were known only to restricted circles, often just to a 'happy few'. To the world at large, their names ring no bells. Such a man was Joseph Retinger.

Behind the frail and ailing constitution of this little man, who suffered from an affliction of the eyes for many years, was a will of steel, a remarkable mind, and inexhaustible energy.

Poland was his motherland. He was passionately attached to her; and during the Second World War, though no longer in the first flush of youth, he risked his life by parachuting into occupied territory to contact the Polish Resistance.

But he cherished within him another great love: a United Europe.

Between the Wars, and particularly after the second world conflict, he foresaw, much earlier and more clearly than most, the clash that would ultimately occur between the free world and the communist bloc. And he realized that, if communist ambitions were not to sweep the board, 'solidarity in freedom' would have to be the watchword of the Western nations.

Accordingly, he became the apostle and champion, first of a United Europe, and next of a strong Atlantic Community.

It was in the latter context that I really came to know him. Shortly after the Second World War, when so many people laboured under the delusion that the totalitarian and free countries would henceforth succeed in working together in a spirit of good will, and even genuine friendship, he came to pay me a visit.

He had anticipated that this collaboration could not endure and that, in order to counter the dangers of the break that was bound to come, close harmony would have to be achieved among the free nations, and above all free Europe and the United States.

He was deeply concerned about the divergencies, already visible or impending, between the United States and Europe on certain important issues. He considered it of vital interest for the free world to smooth over these differences and reconcile all those who belong naturally to one and the same community.

This marked the beginning of those meetings between eminent American and European personalities that were later to be known as the 'Bilderberg Conferences'. With his typical modesty, Dr Retinger always contrived to remain in the background; but he was, in point of fact, the prime mover. Thanks to his vast understanding of men and problems, this simple, retiring man never failed to bring his clearheaded and stimulating influence to bear; nor did the wellspring of his inspiring activity ever run dry.

Many misunderstandings between America and Europe were dispelled by these conferences and by the personal bonds that grew out of them.

The Bilderberg Group hopes to continue its work for as long as is necessary, guided by Dr Retinger's example and by the spirit that characterized this good comrade of ours who, though small of build, was, we may confidently assert, a truly great man; one to whom the free world owes a considerable debt.

INTRODUCTION

I heard of him first only a few weeks before I met him. There had been a rather scurrilous article by a well-known Polish journalist suggesting that Joseph Retinger, who played, as usual, a 'mysterious' role during the war, must be a secret agent. That was July 1948 and the Polish exile press in London was full of introspective articles inquiring when and how the country had been betrayed. Now and again the name of Retinger was mentioned. Although he had devoted friends, he also had tenacious enemies. He was credited – and rightly – with being very influential, but no one was able to give a short answer as to how and why. He had never held any official post, never had much money and had never taken part in public debate. All this created mystery and made him a choice target for those who sought to explain events in terms of a vast conspiracy.

Being in those days a novice in public affairs, I went to see him with mixed feelings of apprehension and curiosity. His secretary and companion had just left to settle in America and a mutual friend suggested that he should see me. I had just passed my final exams and, with my scholarship coming to an end, was eagerly looking for a job. I had no idea what it would mean to work for Retinger but felt that there was no harm in trying.

He lived in the top floor flat of an Edwardian mansion in Westminster, a district I found particularly depressing but which he liked as it recalled his earlier days in London. My surprise was great when the door opened. I saw a man of slight build, with the face of an aged monkey, with protruding, penetrating, slightly malicious but not unkind brown eyes, a broad and friendly grin, irregular yellow teeth and brownish hair more or less tidy in front but frolicking at the back. He wore baggy trousers, a tie largely independent of the soft collar shirt it was supposed to adorn and an old sleeveless sheepskin jerkin as often worn by Polish peasants. He walked and moved with difficulty. It was in fact a shuffle, which aged him greatly. We sat down in his drawing room and I noticed his hands, surprisingly big with very long fingers. They must have been very strong in his younger days and yet there was something feminine about them. They were obviously worrying him as he stretched them continuously. To hold a heavy book or pour a drink out of a full bottle was difficult. During the war, when on a parachute mission to occupied Poland, he had been struck with complete paralysis, which over the years faded sufficiently to enable him to walk and work, although with some difficulty.

He quickly put me at ease. I learned that he needed someone to look after him, and do various chores. He had to travel a good deal, and because of his health, needed a companion. Money was hardly mentioned. Somehow or other I would be provided for and, in any case, I might as well take it that with him I would never make any, but instead would have an interesting life.

This proved to be perfectly true. The next twelve years were a long and fascinating adventure. He used to say that small things were as difficult to accomplish as big ones. So why waste time on small-scale problems? He himself always went for the biggest, and more often than not succeeded. His personality, his adventures and his achievements were remarkable.

What kind of a man was Retinger? What were his motives, his ambitions and his passions? What were his cards and how did he play them? His character was as colourful as his silhouette was odd. He was capable of being tremendously endearing, or strangely irritating, but never dull. He was a past master at his own game and the assortment of gifts and failings at his disposal was most unusual.

During his last six or seven years he was preparing notes for an autobiography. But, as he knew only too well, he was neither a polished writer nor a good storyteller. Steadily he dictated notes, sometimes whole chapters, without much of a clear idea of where it would all lead or where he wanted to arrive. He toyed with his task, but never really got down to it. He mistrusted his style and sometimes his own opinion of himself and the part he might have played in the events he recalled. He left these notes under my care, as material for a biography, or else to be published, edited and completed by notes and commentaries. This I have tried to do, extracting descriptions of key events and situations which he regarded as significant. Some are of historical importance, others simply picaresque, shedding light on some period of his life. There are of course many gaps, particularly in his early days, and I find it difficult to reconstruct the exact chronology of his travels and activities in the decade following the First World War, since he would only recall what he thought was interesting or politically important. Perhaps, with time, the duller or more prosaic patches simply faded from his

memory. At the time I was with him, I came to share his attitude and never questioned him too closely. I now realize my fault and the gaps in my knowledge.

I think I knew Retinger well; as well as one can hope to know a man with whom one shares work and daily existence for twelve years. I met him, however, when he was already sixty and crippled. I watched him grow old. I wished I had known him when he was younger and in good health. I often tried to imagine him in his prime, leading an active and probably restless private life. I looked at the few old photographs he had. They gave the impression of a man of great energy, of great zest and passionately involved. I heard various stories and reminiscences, but they did not measure up with first-hand experience.

PART ONE

The Early Years

Stories of childhood and schooldays can be tedious and seldom contribute anything significant, or more important, anything of interest to the reader. The general atmosphere of a man's upbringing, however, can leave an indelible mark on his character. Longings, ambitions and motives are frequently rooted in early life. I was often astonished to see to what extent this was true in Retinger's case.

Joseph Hieronim Retinger was born on 17 April 1888 in Cracow, the youngest of four children. His father Josef Retinger was a lawyer, whose family, of German stock, had settled in Poland some time in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, and produced some professional people and a number of scholars connected with the Jagiellon University of Cracow. His mother came from the country and her parents had a small estate nearby. His father was the legal adviser and friend of Count Wladyslaw Zamoyski, an enormously wealthy eccentric with vast estates in both North-West and Southern Poland. When he died suddenly, Zamoyski began to look after young Joseph who was still at school.

Cracow was a town with a strong character of its own. Up to the middle of the sixteenth century it had been the capital of Poland. In its midst stood Wawel, the old royal castle, which by the end of the nineteenth century was increasingly regarded as a national shrine, the symbol of the glorious past. The town itself, small and with little industry, was rich in ancient monuments and churches, in which the Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles happily coexisted; the university was the oldest in Central Europe after Prague. At this time, too, many outstanding artists and intellectuals worked in Cracow, and yet it gave the impression of a town which lived for the past rather than for the future. 'The most beautiful of ancient towns – and the most uninspiring' – Joseph Retinger wrote many years later – 'In opposition to the past, the present Cracow did not supply any spiritual food for a youthful, adventurous imagination – there was indeed a complete lack of faith in it. In fact the greatest festivities of the town were celebrations in honour of men dead a long time ago; of those who had toiled and suffered for Poland. Festivities of mourning!'

There was, however, a sound reason for it. Poland as a state had ceased to exist at the end of the eighteenth century when it was partitioned between Prussia, Austria and Russia, which took the major part. During the Napoleonic times, and again in 1830 and in 1863, Poles fought for independence. Otherwise they prepared for it and worked to maintain national consciousness and the national idea. In all this, history played a crucial part. It had to be preserved to imbue each successive generation with the spirit of patriotism. Cracow, with its historical associations and its rich monuments became a centre of national culture.

And in this ancient city patriotism was a widespread cult. 'I was told again and again about my father's and grandfather's adventures in the Polish rebellions against the hated Russians,' recalled Retinger. While at school 'there was the same aroma of tradition, buried glory, vanquished hopes. The same atmosphere permeated the town: the relentless, hopeless, the most unselfish love for a country which did not exist. Our boyish reactions – mine and those of thousands of other Polish lads of the same age – were controlled by the past, the discipline of which we were bound to accept, by the everlasting sadness of our surroundings, the tedium of living among the dead, by the exertion of moving among the exalted.'

Young Retinger, who must have been an exceptionally gifted and precocious boy, was finding life 'happy, dull, tedious to an insufferable degree'. As he grew older he increasingly resented the lack of 'elbow-room for individual exuberance'. He recalled that 'life went on without the excitement of international activities as in England, the United States or France, without pride in the present, without hope for the future'. Like every boy nearing the end of his studies, he wondered what he would become and what he should do. To conform or to rebel, to stay or escape. His penchant for the paradox made him once exclaim to a friend at school, 'I wish Poland would soon be free again so I would not have to be a damn patriot!'

Many years later he described his dilemma on leaving school: 'I would not relinquish my past, and the inner dictates of my tradition, but at the same time my youthful, active mind urged me to look for new and wider horizons, to keep the faith of my fathers but to live the life of the modern European. Hence – unconscious opportunist – while rejoicing in the sadness of my heritage, I wished to combine the opportunities of the present world with my patriotic duties by stepping outside the geographical pale of Polish nationalism. I wanted to live unhampered by frontiers and passports, by the sinister atmosphere of the past, by the bitter disappointments of the present, but still devote my work to my country. I decided to get acquainted with what is greatest outside the boundaries of Poland, and later to serve my country by bringing Poland back into international activities.'

For a time he toyed with the idea of entering the Church; what attracted him was the thought of entering Papal diplomacy, where he might have had some scope to work for his country. This would not have been the case in the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, concerned as it was solely with the defence of the Hapsburg interests. He enrolled in a seminary but withdrew, as Zamoyski offered to send him to Paris and to pay for his studies.

So Joseph Retinger turned up in Paris in 1906 at the age of eighteen. Although he stepped into another world he was not altogether disarmed. He already spoke French, but above all he had two valuable assets. He was related to the Godebskis, whose home was one of the leading *salons littéraires* of the period, and he was the protégé of Zamoyski. Both looked after him, opened their homes to him and through them he was able to meet an impressive array of people.

He started studying at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques and worked hard and successfully. But at the same time he wished to meet people and learn about life. Among the autobiographical notes he left, there is a long passage recalling the days he spent in Paris. It covers both the time he was studying and presumably also some later visits before the First World War. Its chief interest is in the astonishing range and variety of friends and acquaintances he managed to acquire. He must have been not only well introduced but also exceptionally gifted to become accepted in those circles at such an early age. It explains much of what happened to him later. This is what he wrote in one of his notes:

> 'My family connections made the task of meeting people comparatively easy. My guardian, after my father's death, was Count Wladyslaw Zamoyski, the head of one of the richest and oldest Polish families, but born in France, a French citizen and related to most of the old aristocratic families of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. My cousins, the Godebski, also of Polish origin, settled in France for three generations, were at the time of my arrival one of the most beloved couples in the literary and artistic world of Paris.
>
> 'If ever there was a saint on earth Zamoyski was one. Ascetic to the

point of sleeping on bare boards until his death at the age of sixty-six, he never spent an unnecessary penny on himself, at the same time distributing his whole enormous revenues anonymously – sometimes through me as intermediary – for charitable ends. When Poland was reborn he offered his whole fortune to public institutions; hundreds of thousands of acres of land, factories, palaces, fabulous collections of art, a famed library, reserving for himself until he died just one room. Luckier than most dreamers, he died soon after he made this foundation, which has since been mismanaged by careless trustees. Fanatically self-sacrificing, he never married, because he dedicated his life to the purpose he cared for; the service of his country and his religion. One of the most handsome men of his generation, he was so strong that I saw him once stop a carriage drawn by four horses by catching its wheel with his bare hands. Not intolerant of others, he preached by deeds and not by words.

'Zamoyski was brought up by his mother, one of Poland's great ladies, a pillar of Catholicism and of the patriotic tradition. To me, she was also a link with the legitimist tradition of European aristocracy as it existed before the advent of Napoleon III. She was for me the living example of the famous encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*. She was, as far as I know, the first person to start a school of domestic science in Poland through which passed thousands of daughters of the country's gentry. She had a tremendous influence among her own class and it often spread much further afield.

'Through Zamoyski I met some of the most distinguished Catholic clergymen of France, of whom I remember best Monseigneur Baudrillart, at that time Rector of the Catholic University of Paris and later a Cardinal – a round, rosy-cheeked, smiling, venerable prelate; an honest man, an eminent scholar, and a famous historian. At the end of his life he found himself under a cloud, having accommodated himself too easily to German occupation during the Second World War.

'Zamoyski introduced me to the Comtesse de Castries. Her salon on the rue du Bac was as famous for its marvellous *boiseries* dating from the middle of the eighteenth century as for its distinguished visitors, who as a rule belonged to the old military families of France. Her husband was for many years a trusted and beloved collaborator of the renowned Marshal Lyautey, whom I met several times during the war. The best proconsul France ever had, the man who pacified and organized Morocco, famous for his short, cutting aphorisms, he could not fit into the democratic régime of Republican France. After he was appointed Minister of War I heard him say with satisfaction: "J'aime la démocratie à condition d'en être le patron" (I love democracy as long as I am its boss). Alas, great military commander that he was, he did not know how to withstand parliamentary criticism, and he was soon forced to tender his resignation and retire to his beloved Morocco. Short and massive in stature, stiff in movements, his military abruptness gave him a superficial likeness to Lord Kitchener, with whom he had mentally much in common.'

(Retinger told me that now and again Lyautey would fall into a rage, grab a vase or some other fragile object and smash it to pieces. His friends noticed, however, as a sure indication of the impending storm, that he would first take off his jacket and hang it neatly on a chair and that he always picked on the cheapest object in the room!)

'I met also in Paris – but not through Zamoyski – the Marquis de Castellane, the famous "Boni", the smartest, the best-looking, the wittiest, the most beloved of all the dandies of the pre-First War France. A friend of the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, he was married to Annie Gould, the richest heiress of America. For several years Boni had at his disposal the twelve million dollars of her yearly income, which he spent on elegant living, on building the much admired pink marble palace in the Avenue du Bois (now Avenue Foch), in *fêtes* and entertainments. Once, for instance, he gave a banquet in honour of the Prince of Wales at the Pavillion de Bagatelle, in the Bois de Boulogne, which cost him over half a million francs (in gold!).

'To a young man like myself educated in a devout Catholic atmosphere, the glamour of this most famous dandy of my time made a tremendous appeal, just as did the antiquity of his lineage. To me he had the flamboyance of a Brummel or of a Comte d'Orsay, and at the same time he was authentic. As André de Fouquières swayed the grande bourgeoisie of the Republic, so Boni de Castellane had a decisive influence on taste among the international aristocracy. He had something of the *arbiter elegantiarum* of Petronius, yet at the same time he had the dash of the Duc de Lauzun or the Duc de Richelieu. In the drawing room he was a *grand seigneur*, but in the street he was just a man beloved of the people, something like the "Roi des Halles" of *The Three Musketeers*.

'I remember once being with him in a horse cab near Les Halles in Paris, when it overturned. As we scrambled out, the market women surrounded us, exclaiming: "O, mon pauvre petit Boni!"

'When walking with him round Versailles he reminded me of a courtier of Louis XIV, but when he was in the company of Forain or of Isadora Duncan he certainly belonged to the end of the nineteenth century.

'The eighteenth century appeared in Boni especially when it came to building. He was one of the few builders of that period, commissioning the famous Palais Rose, and the magnificent Gardens of the Marais. He still lived under the spell of the period of Louis XIV and loved to interpret its beauties to me. For him nature was an imitation of art, and he used to say that art was more important than nature. "Trees," he used to say, "ought to be placed as they are here at Versailles, not left to grow wild. They should be arranged in pots, or if planted, then planted in symmetrical lines." He liked English gardens, but thought them not sufficiently artificial, and not sufficiently "civilized". His favourite landscapes were not those of Capability Brown, but of de Lisle. "Art abhors nature," he used to say and he would quote a saying of the Duc de Gramont who, at a stag hunt, when the hounds lost the scent, said: "Bien sûr! Ça empeste des violettes" (But of course – the air is polluted by violets).

'Boni was also a great expert in furniture, and when he divorced his wife and lost her income he earned his living by furnishing apartments or houses and then selling them to rich people.

'Notwithstanding his triumphal progress among elegant society, he was astonishingly well-read in historical and artistic matters, had a good knowledge of politics, and his opinions were valued by European statesmen; by old Lord Lansdowne, then rarely emerging from his retirement, as well as by Léon Blum, at that time a correspondent of the paper *Comedia* and a tyro in socialist politics. Castellane, in fact, knew how to combine pleasure with political intrigues, and once succeeded in getting himself elected to the Chamber of Deputies, where he delivered some good and witty speeches. He was indeed a sort of link between the Court of Versailles of the eighteenth century and the Congress at Versailles in the twentieth.

'For many years, until his death, he honoured me with his friendship and through him I met that section of French society which, alien in spirit and poise to the environment of Count Zamoyski, kept up in the twentieth century the traditions of Louis XV and the Regent.

'Boni impressed me tremendously when I was a young man, but I must add that I grew to love him, because of his real generosity and because I learned a great deal from him. To him I owe two initiatives which happened to be important in my life, one which ended in failure; the other which has lasted till now. The first was an attempt at a separate peace with Austria during the First War, the second was the unity of Europe.

'But when in Paris I spent most of my time in the artistic atmosphere of the Godebskis' home. The great-grandfather of the husband had been a fine Napoleonic soldier, killed in a battle against the Austrians. He had also been well known as a minor poet.

'His father was famous as a sculptor in his day, and even more famous as a beau of the Second Empire and a friend of the gilded bohemians of those days, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Barbey d'Aurevilly, etc. Even in his old age he was exceptionally good-looking, with a most subtle profile, big dark eyes, and snow-white hair dressed in the way Paderewski later made popular. Among the countless stories about him I like the following best, because it characterizes more than anything his ready wit and impetuosity. Once when walking on a rainy day along the dirty, badly paved streets of Paris, he saw a pretty, well-dressed girl, dismal and hesitating before crossing the muddy street. Godebski, without the slightest hesitation, took her in his arms and carried her across. But the girl, once safe on the other side of the road, angry at the cheek of an unknown young man, gave vent to her indignation and in plain words expressed her anger at his cavalier-like ways. She must have been offensive because, without thinking twice, he once more lifted her bodily, carried her back to the spot where he had picked her up – and left with a bow.

'His son, my cousin and friend, Cyprien Godebski, affectionately called Cipa, was an exceptional creature, a great would-be artist, but wholly unproductive and totally incapable of expressing himself. His sterility was due partly to his physical infirmities, as both his right arm and right leg were crippled, and partly to an inherent laziness, which was intensified by the fact that he had a sufficient income for his needs. I have met few men so perceptive of all art, so strongly moved by beauty and so unselfish in their appreciation and admiration as

Godebski. What made him especially liked by his friends was his unstinting praise when he liked a thing, and his lucid criticism when he did not. Jovial and full of vivacity, he was always on the alert for new discoveries and fresh artistic sensations.

'His wife, Ida, was the perfect companion for such a man. Intelligent, quiet, easy-tempered, she had perception of beauty without the hunger for it; she was its friend and not its worshipper. She could appreciate intelligently a masterpiece, but was never on the look-out for such. She used to say that to admire a thing she must first handle it, "mettre la main dessus".

'They were a most united couple amidst their bohemian surroundings, and the pretty and admired woman, married to an infirm husband, never left him for a single night until some twenty years after her wedding-day she was suddenly obliged to go to Poland and stay for a month or so.

'There was also a half-sister of Cipa, Misia, famous for her beauty, elegance and wit in the Parisian smart society of the Third Republic. She married in turn a North Pole explorer; an editor of a famous literary review, the owner of the most important newspaper of his time, notorious for the political power he exercised through discreet blackmail; and finally, a wealthy painter, José Maria Sert, who specialized in canvases of enormous dimensions. The well-known wit and cartoonist, Forain, on being asked how those paintings were transported, replied: "Ca se dégonfle" (You let the air out).

'I best remember Misia by her saying once when suicide was discussed in her presence: "Me suicider – je préférerais mourrir" (Commit suicide – I'd rather die). The fact is she did attempt suicide some time later by taking poison and it was a miracle of medical skill that she ever recovered.

'When in 1906, I arrived in Paris the most frequent *habitués* of the Godebskis' were two young, very dark men in their early thirties, both full of gestures, both with a ready flow of talk and easy laughter. One looked like an eighteenth-century prelate in disguise, with his Roman nose, piercing eyes and the most beautiful white hands – this was Maurice Ravel; the other had the well-advertised face of a *gavroche* and the twittering of a sparrow – this was Pierre Bonnard. They were struggling young artists, Ravel keeping himself and his mother by giving music lessons; Bonnard by occasionally selling a picture for a few francs. Both then entirely unknown, they were later to achieve great fame. Together with them, I often met painters like Vuillard, Laprade, Vallotton, and musicians like the incomparable pianist Ricardo Vinez, the Rabelassian composer, Claude Terrasse, the angular Florent Schmitt, Deodat de Severac, and later on Eric Satie, Poulenc and many others.

'Among the writers my greatest friend was Léon Paul Fargue, always in love, always reciting poetry, an indefatigable night bird, whom I used to meet in the late hours around the Capitole, the Grillon, Lajunie or other places of Montmartre, then at its gayest. Not a rare visitor was Charles Louis Philippe, looking like a monstrous gnome and talking like an angel, and the old Elémir Bourges who spent thirty years writing three novels, and finally Jean-Aubry, with whom I wrote some articles on Poland in the *Revue de Paris* and who years later became an intimate friend of Conrad and his literary executor. Arnold Bennett also became a great friend of the family and kept in touch with them until his death.

'My café at that time used to be the famous Café Vachette on the corner of the Boulevard St Michel and the rue des Ecoles which, alas, disappeared in 1914. The pride and central figure of the establishment was Jean Moréas, the most classic of French poets of modern times. Dressed with easy bohemian elegance he and Conrad were the only non-Englishmen who knew how to wear a monocle. When seeing me he used to bellow a quotation from Ronsard: "La Pologne que Mars et l'Hiver accompagne", and sitting himself among his cronies was given to reciting poetry, mostly classical. Here I met Ricciotto Canuto, a pre-futuristic poet. When war broke out he joined the Italian volunteers fighting in France and a story went round that once, when he ordered his troops to attack, his fine speech was greeted with a burst of applause, but nobody moved.

'Etienne Rey and Jean Giraudoux also visited the Vachette. Here too I made the acquaintance of Bernard Grasset, who started his great publishing firm on a thousand francs lent to him by his uncle, Professor Grasset. In fact his first publication was a book of mine, *Le Conte Fantastique dans le Romantisme Français*, which, I am sorry to say, did not bring him great profit nor me great glory. Here I introduced him to Alphonse de Chateaubriand, whose first novel, *Monsieur de Lourdines*, printed by him brought both money and fame. Here Edouard Goldstein, a Jewish fellow-countryman of mine, spent most of his spare time. After taking part in the last Polish insurrection of

1863 he escaped to France, where he formed a most marvellous collection of curiosities and art objects, which he offered to the city of Cracow a few years before the War. He decided to remain in Cracow as the keeper of the collection, but, unable to get used to the way they served his boiled beef in local restaurants, he left the country again after a stay of some few months. Sometimes the café was honoured by the visit of Paul Fort, the "prince of poets", who reigned supreme at the Closerie des Lilas, but was rather reluctant to visit those alien parts.

'I frequented the Café Vachette every evening for years, and most of my friends of my own age used to compose their writings there in spite of the noise and tumult. There also I met and became friendly with Jean de la Ville de Miremont, a young poet from Bordeaux, who, just before the outbreak of war in 1914, published a few most promising poems. He was the first of my friends to be killed. I also used to meet François Mauriac and Pierre Cathala. Mauriac became one of the most famous French novelists. Pierre Cathala had a very different career. I remember the four of us sitting once in the Vachette and talking of what the future would bring us. Jean de la Ville said: "I am going to be a poet." Mauriac said: "I am going to interpret the beauty of Catholicism." Cathala said simply that he was going to be a Minister. During the Second World War he became Minister of the Interior in the Vichy Government and after the War was condemned to death.

'The Frenchman who had the greatest influence on me was André Gide, whom I met quite unexpectedly. I happened to be travelling from Prague to Paris in the same compartment as an ascetic-looking middle-aged man with a small moustache, and during the long journey we talked about literature in France. Only on our arrival in Paris did he tell me that he was André Gide. He had then just published his *Nourritures Terrestres* and was known only as yet among a few people.

'After our first meeting I saw him quite often between 1908 and 1916. There are a few references to me in his *Journal*, and he was in fact exceedingly kind to me. At that time I thought, as so many young men do, that I might have a talent for writing, and I produced some sort of short story, of which I remember nothing but the title *Les Souffleurs*. I gave it to Gide to read, and he was good enough to spend a lot of time on it, making copious notes on the manuscript. Afterwards, for a couple of hours, he explained to me the art of writing, and finally said: "Anyway, Joseph, I don't think you will ever be a writer!" That was the end for me, so far as fiction was concerned.

'It was Gide who gave me some notion of the way to look at pictures, although I must confess that we did not see eye to eye. He liked either advanced pictures, such as those of Segantini and Maurice Denis, or pictures with a meaning. He was always on the look-out for young painters. That is why he backed Drouet in the opening of an art gallery for modernistic painters in the rue Royale, and gave their first opportunity to some foreign artists. For instance, he arranged an exhibition for Wojtkiewicz, a Polish painter, which helped him to achieve a certain success in Paris. Without doubt Wojtkiewicz had talent as a painter, but what mainly interested Gide was his satirical outlook. Gide wrote a preface for the catalogue of his first exhibition and helped him to sell some pictures. Wojtkiewicz was a young man, slightly older than myself, and became a great friend of mine. He painted quite a number of good pictures at that time but, alas, his career was cut short by an early death. He was the only artist of my acquaintance to die from poverty because Poland, much poorer than other Western countries, could not afford to support a rebel painter.

'The last time I saw Gide was during the First War. After World War Two I tried to see him again both in Neuchâtel and in Paris, but alas! he was already too ill to receive me, or perhaps too anchored in old age to wish to revive memories of the past.

'There was no great writer among the British politicians of my youth, while in France politicians with a literary talent like Léon Barthou and Edouard Herriot never displayed any interest in social problems. In those years the fate of the oppressed European nations, the class struggle and the future of the backward nations was simply anathema to the intellectuals, who were therefore not prepared either for Communism or for the rise of independence movements in Asia, Africa and South America. Among the men of letters in France the only exception was probably André Gide. The future will, I believe, prove that his influence, apart from its artistic value, was of similar magnitude as that of Voltaire in the eighteenth century. Gide was certainly responsible for many things which happened in his period.

'I also discovered that my artist friends did not conform to the widespread bohemian legend. In their private lives they were as good bourgeois as anyone else. I can recall only one escapade, and even that was not very wild. The story ended somewhat unexpectedly. I used to see quite often at the Godebskis' Claude Terrasse, who was the last of the great *operette* composers. He was a giant of a man, well over six feet and full of good humour. He was a brother-in-law of Pierre Bonnard, and his sons, slightly younger than myself, became great friends of mine. Knowing of my nightly excursions with Fargue, and others, he said he would like to join us. We started in the company of some amusing Belgians and forgetting the time, continued to talk until the early hours of the morning. Suddenly, with the coming of dawn, Terrasse remembered that he was a married man and that whenever he got home late he had to take off his shoes so as not to disturb his family. He was very worried and we tried to invent a good excuse for him. Finally a story was concocted. One of the group, a member of the editorial staff of *Gil Blas*, a daily paper with a popular gossip column, suggested that we tell Madame Terrasse that her husband had been involved in an early morning duel to defend the honour of King Léopold II of Belgium, who was a great lady-killer. We then got Pierre Bonnard to tell the story to Madame Terrasse and warn her that her husband would not be home until much later in the day. He was to tell her that no blood had been shed, but that peace-making took some time. And so Claude stayed with us until noon, and Madame Terrasse had no grounds for complaint when he arrived home slightly excited. The amusing sequel was that a few weeks later Terrasse was decorated by the Belgians.

'The milieu in which I lived was in no way interested in politics. The people I met were interested in human emotions and their expression. They were sincere about life and liked fun but disliked sophistication. They were emotionally highly sensitive, and moved by other people's sufferings, for they did not yet know the cruelties which the war was to bring.

'Nothing can better illustrate this attitude than an episode I lived through with Ravel. At that time Liaboeuf, a notorious bandit, was caught, tried and condemned to the scaffold. He was the symbol of crime, but whatever his sins had been, have men the right to take the life of others? That is how most of my friends saw it. None more than Ravel, whom I met the night before the execution, shaken and broken in spirit. He talked excitedly and when I finally persuaded him to sit and rest in the Napolitain, he broke down completely and began to sob like a child . . .

'Thus I lived for several years among artists and tried to write books and articles on French literature and arts. These did not pass without comment: Paul Valéry remarked once to me that they reminded him of a souvenir from the seaside, adding "C'est plein de coquilles" (coquille being the technical French for mistakes).

'I was preparing to be an intellectual but at the same time was not forgetting the object of my studies. I was studiously working at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques trying to learn the intricacies of European politics.'

2

The company of so many gifted and influential people must have greatly influenced young Retinger and gave him a tremendous start. Later, he would often acknowledge that it flattered him no end and inflated his ambitions. It may have also developed the bohemian side of his nature which the trials of life later confirmed.

He had great zest and energy. His capacity for work must have been considerable, the more so as – so he claimed – he was quite abstemious in his personal habits. In 1908, when only twenty, Retinger became Docteur ès Lettres at the Sorbonne, which was a brilliant achievement. Ever after he used the title in keeping with the Central European tradition.

After Paris he went to study in Germany, Italy and England. First in Munich, where he studied comparative psychology (*Völkerpsychologie*) which he reckoned might be useful for a political career. Thanks to introductions from André Gide he met some German artists and got to know Franz Bley, a well-known Catholic essayist. He also worked on his first book *L'Histoire de la Littérature Française depuis le Romantisme jusqu'a Nos Jours*, on which he had made a start in Paris.

In Munich, where he met Hans von Weber and the Propylean Verlag, he learnt something about publishing and so, two years later, back in Cracow, was able to start a literary monthly which from the artistic, if not financial, point of view proved quite successful. Not only did he succeed in securing contributions from well-established Polish writers, but he also published new ones who were later to achieve renown. Several of his friends from Paris and Munich became regular contributors, such as Franz Bley, Arnold Bennett and Austin Harrison, while André Gide gave him his book *La Porte Etroite* for serialization before it even appeared in French.

Soon after his return to Cracow in November 1912 he married a Polish girl, Otalia Zubrzycka. They shared the same interests and the marriage started happily. Shortly afterwards the Supreme National Committee, an organization consisting of representatives of various Polish political parties in the Austro-Hungarian part of Poland, but linked with Polish organizations in the Russian and German parts of the country, asked him to open and run a Polish Bureau in London. Its aim was to acquaint the public with the Polish question and gain support for Polish independence.

Before the First World War, the régime of the Habsburgs was the most liberal of the three. There was an appreciable measure of internal freedom and the Poles could elect a sizeable number of representatives to the Parliament in Vienna. Government officials in the Polish part of the Empire were mostly Poles and Poles rose to the highest office under the Dual Monarchy.

In Berlin after 1871, and in St Petersburg after 1906, Poles also sat in parliament, but their influence was less, and the internal régime in the German and Russian parts of Poland was much more repressive. The main concern of all Polish parliamentarians under each of the three monarchies was with internal questions. Foreign affairs were the preserve of the monarchs, while social, political and economic reforms were dependent on whatever progress was made in the given country taken as a whole. In these matters the Polish minorities had even less influence than the true nationals of the country, as they were viewed with justifiable suspicion for their separatist tendencies and Polish patriotic motives.

Whatever conflicts of interest might divide them, the Governments of Berlin, Vienna and St Petersburg would join together in suppressing any attempt at resurrecting an independent Poland. However, Galicia, the part of the country under Austrian rule, enjoyed considerable autonomy. Poles were one of the biggest minorities of the Empire and could use their influence to achieve many of their aims. The Emperor, Franz Josef, did not dislike the Poles and the Poles did not dislike him either. Because of its much greater freedom, Galicia became at the beginning of the century the principal centre for Polish political activities, and in 1910 the Supreme National Committee was set up. It decided to establish agencies abroad; in Paris, London, Rome and Switzerland. There was no well-defined policy; nobody had any clear idea of the impending war, nor of the line-up of the protagonists. People felt, however, that something was brewing and, just in case, they should be present in places which mattered.

Thus Retinger got his first appointment and by the end of 1911 succeeded in opening the Polish Bureau in London. At that time British public opinion was almost completely oblivious to the Polish cause. Hardly a reference to Poland or the Poles appeared in any newspaper or publication, while few politicians were at all aware of the existence of the so-called Polish question. Retinger recalled that he subscribed to a press-cutting agency in order to get everything available on Poland, Poles and anything Polish. After a few weeks he received lots of cuttings about 'polish' of all kinds but none about Poland. Gradually, however, things improved and by 1914 he was receiving more than a hundred cuttings a month.

It cannot have been easy to attract attention and create publicity. It was seldom possible to make a move which would be advantageous all round. Usually somebody's interests would be hurt and it took a lot of skill to acquire more friends than enemies. As a Pole, Retinger was at one and the same time opposed to the Russians, the Austrians and the Germans, and in the years preceding the outbreak of war, when alliances were shaping up, his situation was bound to be a delicate one. But there were also other pitfalls. In one of his notes Retinger recounts a touching episode which illustrates this point:

> 'Of course I was too young at that time to know anything about propaganda and I had to find out about it for myself. I made quite a number of blunders, some of which proved to be beneficial for me in later years. For instance, my first act as head of the Polish Bureau was to offer to the Irish children, who were, for patriotic reasons, boycotting English schools in Ireland, a document of best wishes and solidarity from the children in Prussian Poland who were then boycotting German schools.
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> 'It was covered with some forty thousand signatures and was contained in a beautiful casket. I arranged through Mr Shane Leslie that a deputation of Irish leaders should come to London, where they received this casket with a great deal of publicity – only, of course, on the Irish side. The blunder did not turn out to be very great on the English side because, frankly, nobody cared a damn about it. One of the members of the delegation was Madam Maud Gonne McBride, the mother of Sean McBride, who later became Foreign Minister of

Ireland. In 1949, during the first meetings of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, I had a very close, almost intimate, relationship with Sean McBride and his friendship never failed me. When I asked him why he was always so kind to me he told me that when he was a child he heard from his mother the story of the document presented to the Irish children.'

3

Retinger set out to meet people and to make friends. Anybody who mattered was potentially useful. He attached a great deal of importance to intellectual leaders: writers, academics, artists, since as regards long-term problems, their influence often carried more weight than that of politicians.

Of all the people he was to meet in London at that time Joseph Conrad was to loom the largest and during the years to come was to play an important part in his life. They met through Arnold Bennett who used to be a frequent visitor at the Godebski home in Paris. At that time Conrad lived in Kent and had few opportunities of meeting any fellow countrymen. Although nearly twenty years older than Retinger, Conrad took a liking to the young man from the start and encouraged his visits. The similarity of their upbringing created an immediate bond of sympathy and they soon became great friends. Their relationship can best be illustrated by the following excerpts from the book Retinger wrote many years later under the title *Conrad and his Contemporaries*, which was published in 1943 in America (by Roy Publishers Inc.) since publishing was greatly restricted in wartime England:

> 'In 1909 when I was to meet Conrad for the first time he was practically unknown to the public at large. Beyond a few occasional articles in select publications, never a word appeared about him in the Press and the man in the street did not even know his name.
>
> 'He was so little known that I had never come across any likeness of him. That is why, when I received a telegram from him asking me to come down to his home in Kent, as the train was approaching Hamstreet Station, where he was to meet me, I wondered how I should know him – I need not have worried.
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> 'Hamstreet is a tiny station. When the train stopped at the platform it was deserted but for a few passengers, locals returning home. The station-master, as is usual in such places, was at the same time ticket

collector and porter; and except for him Conrad appeared to be the only person waiting on the platform. But I should have recognized him had there been a crowd. He was so unmistakably Polish, even to his old-fashioned sort of brown greatcoat, like the one my father used to wear when I was a child. He seemed, indeed, a typical Polish landowner from the Ukraine. A Polish essayist once described him as a "sturdy oak", and he has been spoken of as a typical retired seamen; to me he was simply a Pole from the Polish borderlands.

'A trifle too short in build, he was over-broad of shoulders. His head was powerfully sculptured in rough, sharp contours framed with unruly hair and a strong, wiry, but short beard. His nose, almost aquiline, was somewhat broadly, one might say carelessly, carved. His eyes, grey-brown and clear, slightly watering in strong light, were underlined by wrinkles, which under his right eye had become veritable furrows from supporting a stiff monocle. In repose his face was serene but sombre, but sometimes it could light up with a gentle smile or become sullen with anger.

'I went straight up to him, and he greeted me in Polish in what surely must have been the most drawling, singing voice that ever came out of the Ukraine.

'It was a chilly day and dusk was approaching. Conrad immediately conducted me to his car, an ancient Cadillac – I had never seen a more antiquated vehicle. The starting handle was on the left side of the motor and evidently hard to operate. At first Conrad failed ignominiously, lost his temper in his excitement, and swore furiously in three languages. At last, however, we got off and his anger swiftly evaporated. He began to talk with animation, his speech being liberally interspersed with French and English words. And it was ever to be so. He never kept a conversation with me in one language only. When he started liking me, and when he got to know me intimately, he would open with "My dear Joseph" in Polish and then continued in English or French according to his mood of the moment. His Polish, grammatically perfect with an amazingly rich vocabulary, had still the intonation of the district of Poland to which he belonged, and which he had not revisited since he was a child forty years before.

'In all his external physical characteristics Conrad was typically Polish – so were his reactions. Hospitable to a fault, quick-tempered, given to interminable discussions, gourmet, passionate, very hard-working, he had attachment to his country in a manner rarely shared by his fellow-countrymen, who during the nineteenth century brought flamboyant patriotism up to its apogee. Polish patriotism, if not in deeds, is always in words and gestures, overbearing and enthusiastic, dynamic and active. [These words were written in 1939.] Conrad's attachment to his country was objective, passive and reticent.

'We are used in Poland to patriotism which is centred around one definite spot, a village, a town, an ancestral estate. Conrad as an infant was carried away from his native Berdyczew; as a child he strayed from town to town, to spend the loneliness of his schooldays in Cracow. He could not and did not attach himself to any particular nook or corner of Poland. To him the description of the yellow cornfields of the Ukraine sounded like a fairy story, and the hills surrounding Cracow appeared in his memory like so many landscapes celebrated in poetry and painting. His patriotism lacked a physical pivot. He could not enjoy the most intimate kind of patriotism, the love of one's childhood surroundings, which sounds so pathetically in the writings of the great Polish romantic poets, Mickiewicz and Slowacki.

'Leaving his country, he did not leave behind any near relations except his uncle Bobrowski; he did not abandon a familiar hearth, or forsake an ancestral graveyard. When abroad he lived among strangers. His feelings for his country, instinctive and passive, were not often rekindled by meetings with countrymen he cared for.

'He did not meet many Poles in his wanderings. In fact, I recall him quoting only two: an anonymous Polish sailor in *The Sailor's Home* in Saigon, who became Yanko in *Amy Foster* and Count Joseph Szembek, whom he met somewhere in Italy, in Capri or Ajaccio. The descendant of a long line of aristocrats, Count Szembek, the father of a Polish Foreign Under-Secretary, was an illustrious dilettante, whose charm conquered the Conrads. He became the prototype of the *Il Conde*.

'Polish patriotism is often a most exacting passion. As soon as Conrad became slightly known in England, his rising reputation penetrated to Poland, perhaps through his uncle Bobrowski's agency. When he refused to contribute to a weekly called *Wedrowiec* (The Wanderer) and shunned writing in Polish, a well-known Polish woman novelist, Mme Orzeszkowa, wrote a letter to him reprimanding him for abandoning the language of his fathers, and appealing,

rather rudely, to his patriotism, demanded that he continue writing in Polish. This letter perturbed Conrad most deeply. Years after he used to complain to me: "Why impose such an obligation on me? Can't I run my trade according to my lights, inclination and benefit? I am not a political exile, who has duties towards his past acts. I am a voluntary emigrant who left in search of a career. My career now consists of writing in English."

'The action of Mme Orzeszkowa hurt him deeply, and for a number of years he avoided Poles.

'Much later, with my wife and myself, the new Polish generation came into his life, and warmed by our devotion and love for him and his family he consented to return on a visit to Poland. But until 1914 he still refused to meet any more Poles, and it was with the utmost difficulty that I induced him to receive a Polish newspaperman, J. Dabrowski, whose widow was the most famous woman novelist in Poland for many years.'

Retinger's frequent visits followed the same pattern.

'After dinner, which was usually a lengthy affair, the children went to their rooms, and Jessie, having prepared everything for her husband and his guests, retired to her bedroom at about ten o'clock.

'Then we settled down by the fireside in the drawing room and conversation started in earnest.

'Conrad had no use for small talk, but always saw to it that a definite theme qualified the conversation. He cared little for politics and slightly despised politicians, thus demonstrating the indifference of an artist and a not uncertain lack of enthusiasm for the future of mankind. By descent a conservative belonging to the Polish gentry, by tradition a democrat, he was in reality at times almost Utopian in his ultra-conservative ideas; at others he professed an extreme, almost fanatical, radicalism. Sometime she allowed a sickly sentimentalism to bias his appreciation of a situation, and the hammering of power out of ruthlessness and cruelty seemed to him an almost artistic achievement. He did not believe in the "white man's burden", but neither did he feel much sympathy with the under-dog.

'Fundamentally, I suppose, he held that the main object of a State's policy is not so much the acquisition of unlimited power, but the ensuring of happiness to the greatest number of its citizens. He was an opponent of British imperialism, and if he was anything at all, he was what was known at that time as a "Little Englander". He did not like socialism – I suppose because sailors were not socialists in his time. Anyway, any kind of conversation on politics he used to close with the formula "il ne faut aller contre le courant des choses" (one should not swim against the tide), the principle of which appealed to him by its Pythian ambiguity. Social problems were even of less interest to him, although he never ceased to repeat that the easiest solution could be found in what he called the French system of two children per family and in birth control. In foreign politics he had one horror – of Russia; and no definite ideas, unless good wishes for the independence of Poland.

'Of course I am speaking now of his pre-War conversations. During the War, the trend of his argument changed radically.

'But, in fact, he seldom talked politics or debated social questions. On the other hand, he talked freely on art and literature, but he shared my myopia to music. He liked to listen to narratives of personal adventures but rarely spoke of his own, unless it was of those connected with those days of his youth he spent in Poland.

'Once I questioned him about the love affairs of his youth, which he must have had, and pointed out that in his writing the love motif played no fundamental part. Conrad assented with a sharp nod – and thus the conversation always ended.

'Unless he held very strong opinions on a subject – it was never politics, the Polish question excepted – he did not like to differ from his interlocutor, an effect of politeness and ennui. But if he did, he would stand his ground, and would get excitable to the point of rudeness.

'What he liked most, however, was to talk about people. I do not mean gossip, because he was not a nosey person, but he liked to probe the psychology of people, known or even unknown to him, just as he liked best to read diaries and memoirs, infinitely more than fiction or history. I suppose as a student of English diaries he could have given points even to Lord Ponsonby. When I told him of some of my later political activities, meeting with important people, etc., he would ask for the slightest details, inflections of voice, mannerism of gesture, and then he would go over with me trying to define the springs which moved the inner life of, say, Lord Northcliffe or Aristide Briand.

'He had the Slav love for long, intimate talk. And so we used to sit by the fire until two or three in the morning, sipping whisky, which he always took with plain water, advising me never to take soda, as it hardens arteries, and munching from time to time a biscuit with cheese.

'Soon it became customary for me and my wife to spend week-ends at Capel House. In fact, during the War, I spent practically every week-end with him and his wife, whenever I was in this country.

'The procedure was always the same. We arrived on Saturday afternoon; after dinner the ladies would retire, and he and I would spend half the night discussing every conceivable subject over our whisky and water.

'One night while we were discussing Arnold Bennett's first great theatrical success *Milestones*, the idea came to Conrad's head that we two should write a play. I had been telling him what a tremendous amount of money Bennett was making out of the theatre, while Conrad's income at that time – early 1914 – was less than a thousand a year. The idea of making heaps of money from a play flashed through his mind and left it as quickly. But he saw me inflamed with the thought of working in collaboration with him and, touched by my enthusiasm, he wanted to be kind and friendly to me. Anyway he had always wanted to try his hand at playwriting, and here was an opportunity. The whole thing began as a joke.

'We began by flattering each other, commending warmly the new scheme and toying with it. It was already late at night. As usual we were sitting around the fireplace, sipping whisky, nibbling at cheese, and talking away cheerfully.

'Having agreed that the idea was magnificent, having divided the profits of its production and shared in our mutual glory, having decided that Conrad was not going to be present at the opening night, because he disliked immediate contact with the public, and that our wives would act as our representatives, it came to our minds that we must have a plot. Of course, the subject was one of his novels. First we thought about *The Secret Agent* (later Conrad made a scenario out of it) and finally agreed on *Nostromo*.

'At the time when we were talking, in 1914, revolutions were ravaging Mexico, and the drunkard General Victoriano Huerta had made himself temporary dictator. Hence we combined the Nostromo country with our vague notions of Mexico, and decided to make it the background of the play.

'Before agreeing on the details we placed the protagonists. There was to be a South-American intellectual, artist and patriot leading the revolt in the name of the people against a ruthless dictator, who dies exclaiming: "Je meurs honteusement, mais glorieusement, pour des principes que je méprise" (I die wretchedly but gloriously for the sake of principles I despise), because in his heart he was an aristocrat, and here it came to him to lead the masses. There was the dictator, a fat, overbearing, drunken ruffian, the leader of the reactionary, graft-loving mob, who never ceases to appeal to God – "Mais mon Dieu c'est la bouteille" (But the bottle is my God). There was the heroine – I remember we gave her the name of Antonia – an insignificant rose of the wilderness; there were a couple of European engineers, a semi-political club, which also served as a place of gathering for the more distinguished natives and foreigners.

'Of course it was Conrad who mainly invented the plot, the scenery, and the decorations. He talked vivaciously, describing the tropical heat and the heat of the battle, the siege of the club by the dictator, the riot of the Central Square, the nervous gestures of the Latins and the not less nervous gestures of the English. Because, as he insisted, in battle the English, whatever may be said to the contrary, behave with as much nervousness as any Latin. He depicted the heavy and dull drinking of the foreigners and the inspired intoxication of the natives. He sketched with a few phrases the Plaza Central its baroque architecture, its broken statues – I heard the silence between the fighting and the whip-like cracks of the revolvers. By heavens, Conrad was a great descriptive narrator! When years later I went to Mexico and there witnessed fighting and revolutions, and made friends with fat generals and visionary dreamers – all the time, while history was enacted in front of me, I was thinking, "Here they are staging Conrad's play for me alone". The dreamer artistic patriot was Diego Rivera, with his flamboyance, his readiness for action, and his complete scepticism as far as social or political problems were concerned. He had the wish to improve conditions, and that is why he must fight against the rotten existing order. It happens that the existing order was a kind of liberal socialism, tainted with nationalism hence Diego was a Communist of the Trotsky blend.

'And the drunken general? Was not the War Minister Serrano, or old Eugenio Martinez, just this type?

'And the crowd as envisaged by Conrad – I witnessed once on the Zocalo, in Mexico City, the same sinister murmur of the mob – the cracks of rifle fire. And those foreign engineers and investors – honest, straightforward men when dealing at home, but considering fair game anything in the colonies – I wonder sometimes if my love for Mexico is not tinged with a subconscious vision inspired by Conrad.

'Thus we found the plot, the actors, and the background of our play. Now came the question in which language to write it. And a fancy took Conrad to use French for this purpose. He had always wanted to write something in French as he thought French to be the theatrical language *par excellence*, with its sonorous sounds, its precise almost mathematical renderings of thoughts, its lack of nonsense in the structure. And French it had to be.

'By that time it was almost three in the morning. Everything about the play was fixed, now we must put it down in writing. But after looking through his desk Conrad discovered he had no paper left. He had just recovered from an attack of gout and all his writing paraphernalia were in his bedroom, where Jessie was fast asleep. On tiptoe, noiselessly, we looked in every imaginable corner of the house, till finally we discovered in the kitchen several sheets of paper ruled in squares, obviously for kitchen accounts. This we took and started our work. It was stopped in the morning with the beginning of the domestic activities of the house.

'Then for months at every available week-end we worked on the play, pleased like children with a new toy. Indeed, this common work with Conrad is among my most pleasant memories. (Conrad insisted on our continuing to write it on the kitchen paper.)

'At that time my wife invited the Conrads to spend a summer on the estate she shared with her mother and sisters, and we decided to finish the play in Poland. Alas, it was never to be completed. I left the manuscript in the safe-keeping of a friend of mine in Switzerland, but I have not seen him since the First War and I cannot trace his address.'

4

In the summer of 1914 Retinger and his wife went back to Poland in the company of Conrad and his family. A few weeks later war suddenly broke out and the whole party was stranded. The Conrads eventually made their way back through Switzerland, thanks to the help of the American Ambassador in Vienna, but Retinger travelled in a more adventurous way and described it as follows:

'After making sure that the Conrads could stay safely in Zakopane, I went to Lvov, where I learned that the principal leaders of Galicia were gathered. There I talked with Archbishop Bilczewski, with the Armenian Catholic Archbishop Teodorowicz, and with the chief representatives of the political parties, such as Cienski, Dabski and many others. They asked me to go on their behalf, as soon as I could, to France and England. My instructions were simple. I was to work for the independence of Poland and act with as much boldness and determination as I could muster. They assured me that they would back whatever I did in this sense. They knew that during the War their voices could not be heard and that communications would be precarious. They provided me with papers giving me full powers to deal with affairs in England and France. These documents, intended for the British and French Foreign Offices, bore about a score of signatures. Furthermore, the Catholic Episcopate gave me a letter to Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster. I must admit that I was thrilled and excited at the importance of the role entrusted to me in spite of my comparative youth and political inexperience.

'The great difficulty was to get out of the country, since I was then an Austrian subject. Archbishop Bilczewski introduced me to the chief of the police in Lvov, a man by the name of Rheinlender, who was a Pole. I went to see him and he received me in the kindest possible way, telling me that he had no right to obtain any kind of exit visa for me, or even a permit to go to Vienna, and in any case had no means of procuring one for me. He said that the Commander-in-Chief of Lvov was a General Hoffman, gave me his telephone number and added that he was the only person who could do anything for me. Afterwards, under the pretext that he had something to attend to in another room, he left me alone in his office.

'For once, I understood the hint and as soon as he left I took up the telephone receiver and asked for General Hoffman. There was a direct line from the Police Headquarters to the Commander-in-Chief, so it was an easy matter for me to speak to him personally. As soon as he heard what I wanted, he asked me to come to his office immediately. On my way there an idea came to my mind which I tried out at once on him and, when it proved successful, on all other important people during my trip to France.

'I spoke to General Hoffman in French, and not in Polish or German, although my German at that time was very good. I told him the truth; that I wanted to go immediately to France. When he asked my name I took out my passport and pointed at it. The conversation was in French, and as it was in the early days of the War, when things were confused, he probably took it as I wanted him to take it, believing that the name on the passport was not my real one, and that I was connected with some very important people, otherwise how could I have used the private telephone of the Chief of Police? After quite a lot of discussion, the Commander-in-Chief told me that he was quite willing to give me a permit, but only to Vienna, while permission to leave Austria could be obtained only from the War Ministry. When I noticed that this permit bore the number One, it made me childishly proud of being the first person to leave Lvov since the War began.

'The journey from Lvov to Vienna took about three days, instead of twelve hours, and the travelling conditions were not very pleasant, but I eventually arrived early in the morning. I went immediately to the War Office and asked to see the Chief of the General Staff. I was looked at, I would not say with suspicion, but with astonishment, and kept waiting in the corridor under the guard of two soldiers until late in the evening. As time passed, I began to fear that I might be kept under arrest and searched, and that the documents bearing so many distinguished signatures, with their proof of disloyalty to the Austro-Hungarian régime, might get into the hands of the Austrian authorities.

'Feigning indignation at the delay, I cursed them in German, and demanded to be taken immediately to the chief of the General Staff. My outburst was successful, and I was introduced to a middle-aged officer – I think his name was Colonel Stram. Speaking in French this time, I asked him for a permit to go to France. He put the same question as General Hoffman has done. I answered as before, and again referred him to the passport. I had shown him the permit from General Hoffman, and I now asked him to ring up Lvov to find out more about me, knowing, of course, that it was too late to do so. His reaction was the same as that of Hoffman and after much hesitation he consented to give me some kind of a paper enabling me to leave Vienna for Switzerland.

'I then thought I would go one better and told my taxi man to drive me to the German Embassy. It was already dinner time, but I asked to see the German Ambassador, von Tschirsky. A Secretary came to see me, and again speaking in French, I told my story, saying that I refused to go away until I had seen the Ambassador. Various other members of the staff, including some of a higher rank, came to speak to me, but I still insisted on seeing the Ambassador. Finally a little man came out; I was a few years over twenty and he was over sixty. He asked me what I wanted to do in France.

' "I have certain duties there," I replied in French.

' "Who are you?" was the next question.

' "You can see my name on my passport."

' "What are you going to do in France?"

' "What my duty dictates to me."

' "You know that I am the German Ambassador, and you ought to confide in me."

'This I refused very respectfully to do. Our conversation lasted for a few minutes, then the Ambassador looked deeply into my eyes and signed my passport himself. His parting words were: "I wish you the best of luck", to which I replied that I hoped I deserved it.

'I was then driven to the station, but on reaching the Westbahnhof I saw such a crowd of people that I feared I would never get a seat on the train. I demanded to see the military commander of the station. When he appeared, I presented him with my papers, saying: "Here you see No 1 on my permit from Lvov, and my passport signed both by the War Ministry and the German Ambassador. I wish to have a compartment to sleep in as far as the Swiss frontier."

'The commander was so impressed that he cleared some passengers out of a compartment and put me in. Some time later he came back with an elderly man, whom he introduced to me as the chief manager of the railways, and asked my permission for him to share the compartment with me as far as the Swiss frontier. Again I was in luck, because although my papers were often examined during the three days it took us to reach Buchs, the fact that I was with the manager of the railways helped me a good deal.

'In Switzerland I went to see M. Beau, the French Minister in Berne. I told him the whole story and asked him for a visa for France, which

he gave me, treating me with the greatest courtesy. Then I went to see the British Minister, Mr Grant Duff, to whom I repeated my story, but he refused a visa and showed me none of the courtesy of his French colleague. I was even searched for arms before I was admitted to his presence.

'At the French frontier station, Pontarlier, a young Commissaire spécial de Police argued with me for half an hour, and would not let me in to France. He got very excited and angry, and finally said: "Si vous dites encore un mot je vous coffre" (One more word from you and I'll lock you up). It came to me in a flash that if I were arrested in France it would mean that I should actually be in the country. I knew I could find means of freeing myself. I must force the man to jail me! So I said "Merde."

'From Pontarlier I wrote at once to my guardian, Count Zamoyski, who fortunately happened to be in Paris, and asked him to obtain my release. In three days' time I was freed. I went to Paris and saw Philippe Berthelot, the very powerful Secretary-General of the French Foreign Office, who gave me a permit to leave France for England, and on the strength of this I obtained a British visa.

'I also took the opportunity of calling upon a number of leading politicians, including M. Pichon, the Foreign Minister, to explain the purpose of my mission. A few days later, accompanied by Count Zamoyski, I went in the evening to the Gare St Lazare, expecting to be able to leave at once for England, but had to wait until 3 o'clock the following morning for a train. About midnight, shortly after Zamoyski left, another young Commissaire spécial de Police interrogated me, and I was again arrested. This time I was sent to the famous Conciergerie, where Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette were imprisoned.

'From there I sent word to M. Berthelot and he came in the evening with my cousin Mme Misia Edwards (later Mme Sert) to fetch me. They took me straight to dinner at La Pérouse.'

5

Retinger recalled that, in spite of the fact that he had lived in London on and off for several years, by the time war broke out he had no close contacts with leading politicians, as was the case in France. In Paris, where he had spent much more time than in London, he had been helped by his family's relations. Moreover there was a greater interplay between the world of politics and the literary world in which he had so many friends and acquaintances. The same sort of people in England had little to do with Westminster or Whitehall. However, his big opportunity came shortly after his return to London when a journalist friend, hearing the story of his escape from Poland, got him invited to lunch at No 10 Downing Street.

He must have gone down well for afterwards he became a frequent visitor. Access to the Prime Minister was of course a tremendous asset and it helped him a lot. Naturally he fell under Asquith's spell and became his faithful admirer; he always referred to him as one of the greatest statesmen he had ever met and now – writing these lines – I much regret that I failed to question him about his reminiscences of the great man. But then Retinger was not a good raconteur. A propos something or other, he would mention some foible, mannerism or oddity of a person he knew, or he might recount some event. In that case the story had to stand on its own feet and remain an anecdote independently of the quality of the narrative. Fortunately he had plenty of these, so it was always interesting and amusing to listen to him. It might be that little of this sort occurred with Asquith as he seldom recalled any stories. I suspect, however, that, as was the case with people to whom he was particularly devoted, he never mentioned, and possibly even forgot, anything which might in any way detract from his hero.

Through Asquith he met many people, including Winston Churchill. In later years he recalled that, in spite of his inexperience, he was extremely lucky during the early years of the War in meeting and making friends with a great many important and influential figures in England, some of whom helped him a great deal. He recalled with particular gratitude Lady Maud Cunard, a famous hostess, who showed him much kindness and was always ready to invite him to her house to meet the politicians he wanted to talk to.

His comparative youth – he was twenty-eight when war broke out – often proved to be an asset. Odd as it may seem, in the world of politics, it is sometimes easier for a young man to approach older men than it is for people of the same age group. Sometimes, as was the case with Asquith, older men take a fatherly attitude, and if this friendly sentiment is skilfully nurtured by the young man, the chances are that a most useful rapport will be established. Thus when Retinger managed after much difficulty to see Kitchener, who had been appointed to the War Office in 1914, he was greeted with the words: "Now sonny, tell me all about your troubles." What opening could be more helpful?

As he later recalled, his very lack of *savoir faire* also sometimes helped, as it showed that his sincerity and zeal were genuine. But above all he had no personal interest and was working for a good cause, which had a romantic flavour, if only because it looked hopeless. Who but the irrationally hopeful Poles would believe in restoring Poland's independence? In 1914 the Polish cause was still well beyond the political horizon.

But it was also a very delicate one to handle. During the First World War Poles backed all the horses in sight. Some pinned their hopes and fortunes on the Central Powers, and especially Austria, others on Russia and the Western Allies jointly and severally. Although they might have been wooed by the contending powers, they were also mistrusted.

Retinger's position was therefore particularly delicate. He could only succeed, let alone survive, if people took a benevolent attitude towards him. He was an Austrian subject, an enemy alien, trying moreover to maintain contact with an enemy-held country from which he received his funds; he was opposed to Russia which was Britain's ally. His credentials and his mandate could also be doubted and contested both by his own compatriots and by his Western hosts, if only they chose to do so. As is always the case with exiles in similar circumstances, he would be accepted as a representative spokesman only if there was no one better at hand, and in so far as it pleased people to give him credence. Should he come to be regarded as a nuisance he could easily be dubbed a pretentious youngster and brushed aside. In this ambiguous situation he should have acted warily. He did not always do so; which ultimately proved his downfall.

As Retinger often willingly confessed, success went to his head. It must have shown itself in many ways, and particularly in a display of cheekiness to which he was especially prone. Whatever the consequences, he could hardly ever resist a repartee. With a feeling of amusement for his early antics, he confessed to several such cases. One of them, showing apart from everything else gross inadvertence, concerned Mrs Asquith:

> 'I used to come to the parties arranged by Mrs Asquith at 10 Downing Street, [wrote Retinger] where quite frequently I met Lady Randolph Churchill. I don't know why, but both these ladies disliked

> me intensely. Although Mrs Asquith always invited me, she invariably showed a lack of sympathy and finally, after an unfortunate incident, stopped inviting me at all. This was when I was asked by M. de Fleurian, the French Chargé d'Affaires, to introduce to her Princess Sutzo, who at that time was the wife of the very influential Rumanian attaché and who later on married Paul Morand. I came in with her and introduced her to Mrs Asquith, who was sitting with Lady Randolph Churchill. As we were walking away I heard her say very loudly "Lady Randolph, I don't know why Retinger always brings his girls here." I got very angry and said in French, because my English was not very good, "Mais simplement, Madame, parce que j'ai les mêmes goûts que vous – j'aime les femmes" (Simply, Madam, because I have the same taste as you have – I like women). I now realize the bad taste of my remark and the great cheekiness of a young man, but during these first few months of the War my head was completely turned. Later on this was to bring about my failure during my trip to America.'

6

With the outbreak of the War both Russia and the Central Powers drafted Poles into their armies. They all took a fresh interest in their Polish subjects, tried to enlist their support and made more or less vague promises of greater freedom and self-rule after the War.

In the West, interest in the Poles revived as well, principally because of the vast numbers of Polish emigrants who had fairly recently settled in the United States. Although it was not entirely true, it was believed that as many as five million Poles lived in North America, and in several places they were electorally very important. There were also about 200,000 Poles in Canada. All of them were potentially of great interest to the Western Allies and it was clearly worth while enlisting their support, especially as the vast majority came from the German-occupied part of Poland and consequently were naturally sympathetic to the Allies.

Retinger soon noticed that, brought to the notice of politicians in England and France, this argument did more in a few weeks than all his work over the past three years and that as a result Poles again became a factor, however small, in international affairs. Asquith saw the point and suggested that Retinger should go to the United States to find what support the Poles could give to the Allied cause.

This first trip to America taught him a salutory lesson. He went unprepared. He neither knew what he wanted to achieve nor whom he should see. In one of his notes he confessed:

> 'I did not advise anybody of my arrival, and I did not take with me any papers to prove who I was. As a result, when I contacted the most important personalities amongst the American Poles, they simply knew nothing about me; it was only by chance that one of them found a photograph, published a year or so before in England, of a boy scout Jamboree in Birmingham, at which I was described as head of the Polish Bureau. Again, I did not ask the Prime Minister to introduce me to the British Ambassador and therefore I could not request his help or advice. I did not take enough money with me and I was in consequence in constant financial difficulties in America. The only personal recommendation I had in America was from Sir Thomas Lipton, who had a kind of fatherly attitude towards me and gave me a letter to his representative in New York and cabled him to meet me and help me.'

Prompted by the desire to bring back some tangible results, Retinger accepted the suggestion of some people in the States to investigate the possibility of forming a Legion among American Poles to fight under British Command. Joseph Conrad, for sentimental reasons, favoured this idea and some talks and correspondence ensued with the Foreign Office. Its impracticability soon however became apparent and the idea was dropped.

This initial flop in America did not shake Retinger's confidence or lower his sights. It remained one of his principal traits all his life that for him no man was too great, no problem too big, and his audacity earned him many a triumph and many admirers.

One such important proposition came his way in 1916 concerning an attempt at a separate peace with Austria, which he described as follows:

> 'No doubt the idea of a separate peace with Austria was in the air in 1916, but the first person who actually talked to me about this was Boni de Castellane.
>
> 'A suitable background for such a peace certainly already existed in the allied camp at that time. The military power of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, despite its subservience to Germany, was still

considerable, and if that country could be detached from the German war-chariot it would mean a tremendous diminution of the enemy's war potential. Neither in England nor Russia, nor even in France, was there any great hatred of Austro-Hungary.

'Boni had no bias against Austria, believing it was useful as a barrier against the East, as a stabilizing factor in Central Europe, and as a Catholic power. He had always been on good terms with the Austrian nobility, and during the War he had vague contacts with some of the francophile Austrians in Switzerland. From my Polish point of view I could certainly not oppose the idea, since Austria, although distrusted, was not disliked by the Poles. At the beginning of the War Austria helped in the creation of a Polish Legion commanded by Pilsudski against Russia, and also made vague promises to the Poles of establishing an independent Poland. Many Poles believed that the Austrian Emperor wanted to recreate out of Galicia and Russia a completely independent Poland under a Habsburg king, and add Poland to the Danubian Empire as a third component of the monarchy.

'In the summer of 1916, with Castellane's help, I attempted quite unofficially to explore the chances of such a separate peace. I had a short talk with Mr Asquith who did not object if I were to find out about it on my own.

'The first man I thought I should try to convince, and whose support I had to win, was Lord Northcliffe, then by far the most powerful newspaper proprietor and the owner of *The Times*. I did not know him at that time, but I was on very friendly terms with his brother, Lord Rothermere, who used to invite me quite often to breakfast. I discussed with him the idea of a separate peace with Austria, and asked him for an introduction. He made an appointment for me, and coached me in the way I should speak. He told me above all not to spare flattery; I could tell him he was the greatest and the mightiest. That was the way to get him. For his part, Lord Rothermere was to impress his brother with my cleverness. Finally it was arranged that I should see Lord Northcliffe at 22 Stratford Place. Up to the very last moment Lord Rothermere continued to coach me.

'I found Lord Northcliffe in an enormous room, in one corner of which there was a huge desk. There were no chairs, except the one he sat on. This angered me straight away. My first words were: "Don't get up!" which of course annoyed him.

'He took out his watch and said: "Retinger, I have ten minutes to spare."

'I replied: "I don't know whether you would understand all I have to tell you in ten minutes. I doubt it, and if there is a limit to the time you can give me, then I had better leave at once."

'However, he would not let me go. I looked round for a chair, feeling angry, as any conceited young man would in such circumstances. Finally, I sat on the desk, and then we started a conversation which lasted several hours, and at the end of which he agreed to back my scheme.

'Lord Northcliffe wired Wickham Steed, the *Times* correspondent in Paris, to give me all possible assistance. This he did, and so did his correspondents in the other parts of Europe in which I travelled. I think I should say right away that Wickham Steed, who previously had been for several years in Vienna, was not enthusiastic about my idea. However, like everyone on Lord Northcliffe's staff, he did courteously whatever his chief asked him to do.

'In Paris I had a short conversation with M. Clemenceau, who favoured the idea in so far as it would mean shortening the War, but he was biased against Austria because of his anti-clerical attitude. I next had a talk with M. Philippe Berthelot, the Secretary General of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As a Protestant educated in the traditions of the French Revolution, whose family had since played a big role not only in science but also in public life, Berthelot was not very keen. During the Peace Conference he became one of the most bitter opponents of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, partly because of his inherited prejudice against Marie-Antoinette and partly because he considered the Austrian Emperor to be the chief supporter of the Vatican in Europe. However, he did not openly discourage me, and I kept in touch with him, as well as with Lord Northcliffe, throughout this whole affair. Thus, the leading men in the British and French Governments knew about my self-appointed mission.

'I was able to get in touch with the Austrians through the good offices of Boni de Castellane, the Countess de Montebello and Prince Sixte de Bourbon-Parme. The Emperor Franz Josef had died and been succeeded by the Emperor Charles, a man of liberal views. Charles was married to Princess Zita of Bourbon-Parme, who had a deep sense of family loyalties and Prince Sixte, who was living in Paris, was known to be on specially good terms with her. I had many long talks with him, and he on his side tried to smooth my path within the inner circle of the Empress.

'Another person with whom I got in touch was the General of the Jesuits, Count Ledochowski, a Pole, and a friend of my guardian, Count Zamoyski. I went to see him at the Château of Zizers, near Zurich. It was the most spooky place I had ever seen, full of Jesuit austerity, gloom and, I must say frankly, dirt! However, because I was a fellow-countryman, and because I had been recommended by Count Zamoyski, the General received me kindly, and gave me much of his time.

'The head of the Jesuit Order, although he promised me all the aid in his power, was pessimistic as to my chances of success. He was the first person to point out that the Germans had penetrated so deeply into the administration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that it would be difficult for the Austrians to start a negotiation for separate peace without the Germans knowing about it.

'Once in Austria I contacted a number of people, the most important being Count Mensdorff-Pouilly, the former Austrian Ambassador in Paris. The Germans must have had some inkling of my activities, for during one of my visits to Switzerland I received a telephone message from the German Legation in Berne asking me to call a Mr Zimmerman, a high official in the German Foreign Ministry – I believe he was Under-Secretary at that time. But I was too young to dare to speak to an important man who was on the side of the enemies.

'I made many trips between Switzerland, France and England, reporting my findings to my friends, but eventually I came to the conclusion that although the Emperor, his wife and some highly placed Austrians would have liked to make a separate peace, they could not do so without Germany's knowledge, if not permission. Moreover, I had the definite impression that my activities were in some way or other reported to the Germans. I therefore came regretfully to the conclusion that nothing could be done and I advised my friends in England and France accordingly. I never took up the idea again, although other people tried later to revive it.

'This was my part in the effort to bring Austro-Hungary out of the enemy coalition. But the end was not yet. As I have said, Clemenceau knew and approved of the plan. However, when after the War the matter was raised in the French Parliament, and Prince Sixte de Bourbon-Parme was obliged to confirm that he had been involved in the scheme, and that Clemenceau was aware of it, the latter said without hesitation in the Chamber: "Le Prince Sixte a menti" (The Prince has lied). The Prince in disgust volunteered for service in Morocco, where he spent some time.

'While I was involved in exploring the possibilities of a separate peace with Austro-Hungary, I believed that I was playing a big part in international politics, but perhaps I deluded myself. Perhaps mine was one of the kites which were being flown; perhaps other conversations were going on simultaneously. Later I was not sufficiently interested to discover whether the role I had played had been as great as it appeared to me at the time. I can only say that I earnestly prayed for success and that, when I saw the impossibility of the scheme, I tried to put it completely out of my mind. I may have taken myself too seriously, but after all, I was young at the time.'

7

The Austrian episode was not Retinger's only venture into wider international politics. His curiosity had brought him into contact with Jewish communities, and his consequent interest in Jewish problems led to the idea of promoting some kind of international status for Jews who, in Poland as elsewhere, were often unprotected and underprivileged minorities. He met three great leaders of the Zionist movement, Weizman, who later became the first President of Israel, Zabolensky and Nahum Sokolov, a fellow Pole who became his friend. Nothing much resulted from it all, except that it might have provided the reason, or rather the excuse, for some of his political rivals, particularly Roman Dmowski, to dub Retinger a Jew.

At this time too, Retinger first became interested in the idea of European unity which was to become the great passion of his life. Early in 1917 he met Arthur Capel, a young and wealthy Englishman, who had come to Paris to promote World Government, based on a close Franco-British alliance, as the only way of assuring universal peace after the War. Strongly supported by Sir Harry Wilson, whose ADC he had been, Capel aroused the interest of many prominent statesmen, including Briand, Clemenceau and Wilson, and was in touch with the Vatican. He died in a motor accident in 1919; otherwise more would have been heard of this early pioneer of Federalist ideas who, so Retinger believed, paved the way for the setting up of the League of Nations.

For a while the two men collaborated, and Retinger helped Capel with his book *The World on the Anvil*, and became interested in his ideas. Though he was sceptical about their practicability, the seed was firmly planted in his mind.

Most of Retinger's business, however, was of course concerned with Polish affairs. Press and information and what is best described today as public relations played an important part. He wrote two booklets *La Pologne et l'Equilibre Européen* and *Considérations Générales sur l'Avenir Economique de la Pologne*. At the beginning of the War, in London there were also frequent interventions to rescue Poles in difficulty. Many had enemy passports, German or Austrian, and the authorities could hardly be expected to treat them otherwise than as enemy aliens. Most important, however, was the constant effort to inform governments and political leaders of the Polish problem and Polish aspirations. This called for personal contacts, visits and the drafting of notes and memoranda. It was a delicate task, as much of it was opposed to Russian interests and ran counter to the policy of alliance with Russia. Joseph Conrad, in a letter to Richard Curle written in August 1916, refers to 'the cause to which you are so friendly (resurrection of Poland) and for which Retinger is going to put his head into the noose unless wiser counsels prevail . . .'

Indeed his situation was difficult. The Polish interests he was representing were, to say the least, ambiguous, and the Poles were far from united. They looked for help to many people and sought support in every quarter. They gave credence to a variety of schemes, depending on their personal loyalties and preferences, while the fluctuating fortunes of the War, rumours and difficulties of communication aggravated divergencies.

Contacts were precarious – mainly through neutral Switzerland – where several prominent Poles took residence and where emissaries could come from Austria and Germany. No ranking Poles arrived in the West from Russia, however, until 1916.

The belligerent powers, in whose armies Poles were serving, attempted to enlist their support. The C-in-C of the Russian Army, the Grand Duke Nicolas, almost at the beginning of the War, promised the Poles reunion of the Polish provinces and made vague statements about Polish independence under the Tsar. The Austrians, on the other hand, hinted that Poles might become a third partner in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, but because of their alliance with Germany, kept silent about

the unification of the country. They did, however, permit the formation of an autonomous Polish Legion, under their supreme command, to fight the Russians. It was formed at the beginning of the War under Commander, later Marshal, Pilsudski, who believed, and quite rightly, that the central Powers would first defeat Russia and would be later defeated themselves by the Western Allies. Many well-known Polish patriots backed this Legion, which had Polish insignia, wore its own uniforms, and used the Polish language in the hope that it could form the nucleus of a future Polish army, as in fact it later did after many tribulations.

Retinger, whose sympathies were with the Legion, had to bear in mind that he was representing all Poles and that his mission was to win the support of the British and the French.

He must have manoeuvred skilfully to avoid the many pitfalls lying in his path. Perhaps luck played a better part than he cared to admit. In any case early in 1918, when a major problem arose, he over-reached himself and his downfall came. Some time before, a project had been mooted to form a Polish Army in the West. It was to be recruited from prisoners of war, Poles who had served on the Western Fronts, in the German and Austrian armies. Powerful interests, both Polish and Allied, supported this scheme, which later came to fruition and resulted in the formation of an army under the command of General Haller. In the end it did not take part in the fighting in the West, but was repatriated, after the Armistice, to the already liberated Poland. At that time, however, Retinger's chief concern was that soldiers taken prisoner, who would change sides in the War, would no longer be protected by the Geneva Convention. Once captured, they could be shot. He protested as strongly as he could and sent memoranda to all the Western Governments.

That proved too much. At one stroke he multiplied the number of his enemies, came to be considered as a nuisance, and retribution fell.

At the same time, while he was getting into trouble in politics, a major crisis developed in his private life. When I met him nearly thirty years later, he never talked about it and it was only when I came to gather the material for this book that I found in his notes and papers various clues to what might have taken place.

He mentions, in his book on Joseph Conrad, that the great writer rarely invited Americans to his home. The one important exception, was Miss A, whom he calls Jane in the letters written to his wife during the War. Brilliant and beautiful, she turned the heads of many conspicuous and famous men both in Europe and in her own country. A good newspaper-woman and a short-story writer of more than average talent, she had a marvellous capacity for listening and understanding. After she arrived in London in 1916, and until she left a year or so later. Conrad saw a lot of her. She became part heroine in one of his last novels *The Arrow of Gold*. She was one of the very few persons whom Conrad's wife could not stand, and apparently caused a certain estrangement between Conrad and Retinger.

I am not sure whether Jane Anderson, for that was her name, was or was not the cause of the subsequent break between Retinger and his wife, although many things point out that she was. The fact is that by the end of 1917 the marriage had broken down, which was made all the worse as earlier in June their daughter Malina, was born. Retinger fell passionately in love, but this did not give him any joy. Instead it caused him extreme distress, landed him in considerable trouble and affected his health. In a letter he wrote to a friend at that time there is a passage indicating that he even tried to commit suicide. In any case, some time later, his marriage ended in divorce.

He was, not unexpectedly, rather reticent about it all and I never tried to draw him out about this episode in his life. He hinted, however, several times that because of Jane Anderson he went several times to the States. And somewhere, among various reminiscences of colourful or prominent Americans he met in his life, the following happens to be inserted, which describes the tail end of the affair:

> 'The most unforgettable character I knew was Red Anderson. When I first met him he was seventy-eight. His breakfast consisted of a bottle of whisky and a 2 lb steak. Anderson had been an associate of Buffalo Bill. He was the head of the police while the Panama Canal was being constructed under General Goethals, and later was Marshal of Arizona, when Arizona was still a territory. He once showed me his revolver, which had twenty-eight notches, and told me they represented the criminals he had killed, not including Mexicans. At seventy-eight he had a mistress, a woman of not more than thirty-five, who was in love with him.
>
> 'Our first meeting took place in very curious circumstances. I had been very friendly with Anderson's only daughter, but at that time she wished to break with me. While I was in Washington she telephoned to her father to come to her rescue. When Anderson arrived she became frightened at the possible consequences, and when she called me on the telephone to say that her father was expecting me in the Lafayette Hotel, she added a warning. Of course I at once went to see him, but at the entrance to the hotel I met a mutual friend, Gilbert Seldes, well-known later as a literary critic, who said: "For goodness' sake don't go up; he'll kill you!" I went up to the room indicated to me and knocked at the door. When it was opened I saw a man sitting at a table in a similar pose to that of Franz Hals' "Laughing Cavalier", with a ten-gallon hat on his head and a revolver in his hand pointing at me. "I will kill you for all you have done to my daughter", he shouted, and he started hurling accusations at me which were certainly not justified, as when I met her I was still something of a puritan. I lost my temper and shouted all the dirty words I could think of – not many at that time. Anderson was so astonished that he put down his revolver on the table opposite me, and I, becoming more and more angry, picked up some object without noticing what it was and started twirling it round my finger. I suddenly realized that it was his loaded revolver! His daughter, who was looking through the keyhole, saw this, burst in, and grabbed my hand; and then we all began to laugh.'

This must have happened some time in the very early twenties. Shortly afterwards Jane Anderson faded completely from his life. During the last war she was found broadcasting for the Nazis from Berlin.

8

Let us now go back to the spring of 1918. Retinger's protest against the formation of a Polish Army in France created a stir and a storm was brewing. I have never been able to retrace the sequence of events, find out the multiple reasons, nor unravel the mechanics of it all. Jane Anderson might have played a part. Retinger mentioned to me once that it was because of her that Lord Northcliffe suddenly turned against him. Be that as it may, the incident was quite a colourful one as is shown in the following note:

> 'In the autumn of 1917, Philippe Berthelot, Secretary-General of the Quai d'Orsay, told me that he had recently had a visit from Lord

Northcliffe, during the course of which they had a talk about me. He added: "Il veut votre peau". (He wants your head). I was so filled with conceit at that time that I completely disregarded this very broad hint.

'A few days later I was warned by Boni de Castellane that Georges Mandel, Clemenceau's right-hand man, had accosted him and said something very nasty about me, whereupon Boni had answered: "I have more confidence in him, a true Pole, and a true Retinger, than in those men who go under an alias and serve a country in which they were not born." The real name of Mandel was Rothschild, and there were persistent rumours that he was born in Frankfurt.

'In the early spring of 1918 there were signs that my position in Paris was shaky, but all the same, I was somewhat surprised when one day M. Pams, at that time Minister of the Interior, called me to the Ministry. M. Pams, an old man and a very influential politician in France, was a member of the Centre Parties, a right-wing radical of the type of the grand bourgeois who ruled the French Republic up to the time of the War. He was genuinely pro-Polish and genuinely friendly to me, but not very courageous. Until then I had felt grateful to him because he had helped me quite a lot by introducing me to prominent French politicians, and his kindness even went so far as to read the proofs of my book *La Pologne et l'Equilibre Européen*.

'When I went to the Ministry in the Place Beauvau I met in the ante-room M. Kammerer, M. Pams' Chef de Cabinet, who later became a famous Préfet and Ambassador, who warned me that the Minister had bad news for me. When I was admitted to his presence, M. Pams, after a lot of preliminary hesitation, and obviously disliking it, said: "Mon cher Joseph, I have bad news for you; I think you had better leave France."

' "Why?" I asked.

' "Because you have too many enemies here and if you don't leave of your own free will I shall be obliged to expel you."

' "You know more than anybody about my activities here," I said. "Whatever I have done, even when I have protested against the French Government, I have done it openly, and I had the right to defend the interests of my country as I saw them. So far as you are concerned, you know practically every move I have made in France."

'Looking still more embarrassed, M. Pams repeated: "But I shall be obliged to expel you if you don't leave of your own accord."

Young as I was, arrogant as I was, I flew into a rage and said: "Ask M. Kammerer to come here, will you?"

When he came I asked him to look up a time-table and find out the time of the first train leaving France for abroad. M. Kammerer said (this was at eleven o'clock in the morning): "There is a train at four o'clock for Spain."

"Then I shall leave at four."

"But, my dear fellow," said Pams, "there is no need for so much hurry; you can stay here another week or so if you like." Angrily I replied: "Je ne veux pas rester dans un pays de maître-chanteurs" (I do not wish to stay in a country of blackmailers) and I left his room.

'I rang up a few of my friends to tell them I was going away, and at the Gare de Lyons had the pleasure of being seen off by several good friends: the Marquis de Castellane, the Marquis de Dampierre, the Marquis de Chambrun, Anatole de Monzie, General de Monriez and my former guardian, Count Zamoyski. Then the train drew out.

'After a good deal of difficulty over my passport, the Spaniards finally managed in some way or other to let me in very late at night. I cannot now remember how this was achieved, but it may have been because I had a letter from Castellane to the Duke of Alba. I went to Fuenterabbia, where I spent several months in the most abject misery. I had had no time to get any money in Paris before my train left, and had only a few hundred francs with me. I had counted, moreover, on having my money sent from France to Spain, and did not foresee that the French Government might refuse permission for the money to be transferred. I was therefore reduced to the most complete poverty during my stay in Spain, which lasted for about nine months. I went for weeks without food, and for many nights without a bed. I sold everything I possessed, even most of my handkerchiefs, for which I remember I got ten cents. I recall one occasion in Barcelona when I was saved from starvation owing to a General Strike. The restaurants were closed and the lodging house in which I was living served free meals to the lodgers.

'Within a few months after my arrival in Spain there was so much agitation against me in official quarters in England and France that, with two exceptions, most of my acquaintances turned against me. Of the letters which I received at that time, the one which depressed me most was from Harold Nicolson, whom I knew fairly well during the War, and who knew quite a lot about my activities, since he was still at the Foreign Office, and for part, if not the whole of the time, was Private Secretary to Sir Edward Grey. He wrote me a most unfriendly letter. When I saw him during the Second World War I did not refer to it. Of all my numerous friends and relatives, the only material help came from Joseph Conrad, although I was much encouraged by a friendly letter from Sir Thomas Lipton. Later, when I left Fuenterabbia to go to Barcelona, I received a wire from Sir Thomas who, I suppose with the idea of cheering me up, advised me to call at a certain Café de la Marina, where I would find a lot of pretty nude girls!

'During the whole of this period my health was far from good. I was suffering from what was diagnosed as heart disease, and also from chronic insomnia.'

The situation was bad all round. Retinger was penniless, in bad health and under a cloud. His marriage was broken and he was cut off from his friends and deserted by some. Joseph Conrad tried, however, to help and asked Hugh Walpole for his assistance. This letter of his, which only recently came to light, has not I believe been published before. It sheds some light on Retinger's predicament:

Capel House,
31 August, 1918

My dear Walpole,

My acquaintance with Joseph Retinger dates back to 1912. He came to our house with an introduction from A Bennett who had met him in France. R told me then that he had a general mission from the National Committee (Galician) to raise the Polish question in the press of France and England. An impossible task then, in view of the state of European alliances. He confessed to me that he could get no one to touch the subject – out of regard for Russian susceptibilities – but his intention was to remain in the West and persevere in his efforts.

He was very often here for week-ends and talked to me openly of his hopes. Both himself and his wife gained very soon our regard and affection. Our journey to Poland was undertaken on Mrs Retinger's mother's invitation to spend the month of August (1914) at her country place near Cracow – but just over the Russian frontier. We never reached there. The declaration of war caught us in Cracow, and I must say that it was R's friends, political and others, who treated us with the greatest possible kindness, lent me money (which, of course, I owe them yet) and took infinite trouble to get the consent of the local authorities for our departure for Vienna where the efforts of Mr Penfield, American Ambassador, procured our release. I owe them indeed a large debt of gratitude.

I saw a great deal of R in the years '15 and '16. He was very open with me as to his thoughts, his hopes and his feelings. All these were perfectly sound, and it is incredible that a man should seek out a recluse only to lie to him by the hour. His activities during that period are known to the English and French Govts. He was personally known to Mr Asquith, to Mr Balfour, Lord Northcliffe; at our Foreign Office, at the French Embassy. In Paris he was known to M. Berthelot and to Count Zamoyski – a personality above suspicion.

In '17 R remained in Paris and his health broke down. I had rather alarming reports from friends and also from Borys who spent his 3-day's leave there in nursing R, during one of his heart attacks. In 1918 I heard from him from Madrid. How and why R went to Spain I do not know. The question for me is to save this, in many respects, lovable human being broken in health and in fortune from perishing miserably as if abandoned by God and man. For that is how the situation looks to me. If we could get him over here we would look after him. I hope you will do what you can to help me for I am absolutely unable to come to town yet and time passes. Yours ever affectionately

Joseph Conrad

PART TWO

The Inter-War Years

His fortunes at the lowest, Retinger sought to escape from his Spanish exile. Since no Allied country would receive him he thought about Mexico. A doctor advised a long sea voyage and moreover he had a brother in the States who might help more easily should he be in a neighbouring country. Also as he once admitted to me without, however, mentioning the name – his love was in America. This again would point to Jane Anderson who by then was back in the United States. At least, being nearer, he would have a better chance of seeing her again. Finally he wanted to experience another part of the world in addition to the old Europe he knew. With tremendous difficulty, he managed to get, on credit, a third-class berth on a boat going to Havana. He left the following description of this colourful trip which turned out also to be quite eventful for his future:

> 'The ship was in a state of complete disrepair, but had been painted in brilliant colours. She was much older than her skipper. He and the mates were an extraordinary crowd. The skipper was a painter, the First Mate a mathematician, and the Second Mate tried his hand, as Joseph Conrad during his life at sea had done, at writing. I don't think they knew any more about navigation than an Able Seaman! It was a cargo boat of about 3000 tons, with eight first class passengers. I was the only third class one. On deck there was a large shed, which was in fact a barn with some thirty cows in it.
>
> 'We reached Gibraltar safely and were obliged to stay there, for a few days, for repairs. From there we went to Teneriffe, and our boat being one of the few to dock at Las Palmas, the Spanish Governor came to meet us and invited the first class passengers and myself, as well as the skipper and the mates to dinner, and to visit the brothels of the town. I have never seen anything more disgusting in my life, and in spite of the Governor's hospitality I was so tired by about two o'clock in the morning that I went back to the boat, leaving the rest of the crowd behind. At 8 am I was awakened by the steward, who said: "Where the hell are the skipper and mates? We were

supposed to leave at 6 am and there's nobody here." I told him where to look for them, and after a long search they were found, dead drunk. However, the steward succeeded in getting them back to the boat and at last we left. For twenty-four hours we sailed in the wrong direction before the Captain finally discovered this, and we changed course!

'Then came the crossing of the Atlantic, which lasted thirty-one days, almost as long as the voyage of Columbus. There was a very bad storm on the way, and for the first and only time I saw cows suffering from seasickness. I discovered that the animals were not, as I had thought, for export, but as food for us, and every other day the cook slaughtered one of the poor cows, sick or not.

'In the meantime I had become very friendly with everyone on board, and since the food in the third class was not only abominable, but was served in the bunks, the skipper invited me to take my meals with the first class passengers. There I met a man who became one of my best friends and who some time later became one of the most important Mexican politicians. His name was Luis Negrete Morones, and he was returning to Mexico from a trip round Europe.

'When I left Spain I had only four dollars in my pocket, but I had written beforehand to my brother, who was Professor of Bio-Chemistry at the Chicago University, asking him to send me some money to Havana. On arriving there, I took a taxi to the Lafayette Hotel, asking the driver to let me see as much of the city as he could for four dollars, and so I reached the hotel without a penny. I went to the Post Office to enquire about my money and was told that it had been waiting there for me for a month, but that in accordance with Post Office regulations they could not keep it any longer, and had therefore sent it back a few days previously!

'I stayed in Havana for a few weeks trying to earn enough money to enable me to live and pay my passage to Mexico. During this period I had one of the strangest jobs I have ever had in my life. At that time my Spanish was very poor, and since I was in ill health, I could not get any kind of manual work. But I was paid the magnificent sum of five dollars a day as reader in Spanish in a cigar factory. In those days – perhaps it is still the case today – silence prevailed in tobacco factories while workers were making cigars, hence the idea of employing someone to read to them.'

2

A short time later Retinger reached Mexico, where he was to live on and off for the next five to six years. Morones introduced him to the inner circles of the opposition, where he was quickly befriended. These men soon came to power and Retinger began to play a role in the new régime.

It might be useful at this point to recapitulate briefly some of the salient points of Mexican politics during that period.

When the Diaz dictatorship crumbled in 1910 there began a long period of practically uninterrupted civil war. Then, thanks to the military skill of Obregon, Carranza emerged victorious in 1916, following the defeat of the guerrilla armies of Pancho Villa in the north and Emilio Zapata in the south. When in accord with constitutional law, Carranza was due to step down from the Presidency in 1920, another *pronunciamento* by Obregon, his former chief supporter, was needed to make sure of his departure. From that date onward there followed a steady advance towards a constitutional and democratic government, though, throughout the years, countless generals had to be shot to make this progress possible.

Obregon, the new President, nominated Calles, his principal associate, as Secretary of the Government, while Morones – Retinger's friend – who was the chief trade union leader, played a prominent part in running the country. Four years later, in accordance with the constitution, Obregon stepped down and Calles was duly elected, not without a few shots having been fired to facilitate the transition. In the meantime, the CROM (Confederaçion Regional Obrera Mexicana), the creation of a dedicated, small conspiratorial group, led by Morones, grew tremendously in importance and, largely thanks to Government support, assumed the leadership and control of the labour movement. When Calles became President he appointed Morones to his Cabinet as Secretary of Trade and Industry, the key economic ministry.

In 1928 it was Calles' turn to go and Obregon came back. But there was already some rivalry between the two leaders. Each one had a body of his own followers. Politics were becoming more differentiated and complex. A year later, Obregon was wantonly shot by a student. With the support of Calles, Portes Gil became President, pending new elections. During the year he was in office, Government support was withdrawn from the CROM, in favour of more revolutionary and left-wing unions and Morones' power began to wane. In 1929 again with the support of Calles (the 'Jefe Maximo' as he was called) who for years was to remain the real, though unofficial ruler of the country, Ortiz Rubio was elected President, and remained in power, until one morning in 1932 Calles decreed his retirement. Abelardo Rodrigues was duly appointed in his stead and ruled for two years, until 1934, which saw the advent of the very able Cardenas, who turned out to be the strong man of the remaining part of the thirties. In a short time, Cardenas succeeded in gathering power to himself. The tables were finally turned on Calles, and, in 1936, he thought it more prudent to retire to the States, accompanied by Morones.

Since the fall of Diaz, in 1910, relations with the States had been generally bad. Washington blamed Mexico for disorders, lack of protection of American citizens and their property and lawlessness along the border, while the Mexicans complained of interference and exploitation. In 1914, the American Navy intervened in the bay of Vera Cruz. In 1917 Pershing led an expedition to chastise the elusive Pancho Villa who had previously raided American territory. Throughout there was much talk of war, even of annexing some parts of the country to restore order and protect property.

In the early twenties, the Governments of Obregon and Calles were bent on social and economic reform. Strongly radical and socialist, the leaders were implementing the slogans of the revolution which brought them to power. Retinger was impressed by their zeal, their courage and their honesty of purpose. He liked these men and espoused their cause.

I would like now to quote the notes in which Retinger described some of his impressions, his work and two of his adventures:

> 'I never spent more than a few months at a time in Mexico, but in the period between 1919 and 1936 I went there eleven times. I saw Mexico through the eyes of Mexicans, and not through those of foreigners. I travelled a lot in the country and I met every class of people; I therefore feel I had a better insight into Mexican psychology than most foreigners, who only saw the country from the outside. Moreover, consecutive Mexican Governments sometimes asked my advice, which I felt honoured and eager to give.
>
> 'I must stress that I do not consider the Mexicans, especially the Indians, a primitive people, but a young people, like the Europeans were during the Middle Ages. They had the same grand gestures and the gigantic faults which our ancestors had in the period following the fall of the Roman Empire and before the advent of the Renaissance with its habits of reasoning.
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> 'As in the Middle Ages, political or social tendencies were not developed by public opinion, but by a leader, and were named after him. Zapata's revolution was, of course, purely agrarian; it was, however, not remembered as such, but by the name of its leader. The leaders' psychology recalled that of the Condottiere in Europe; their cruelties, their loyalty towards their men and their codes of behaviour, and at the same time a kind of nonchalance in their attitude to material possessions. Pancho Villa should certainly not be compared with the gangsters of today. There was something of a Robin Hood in him, and something of the medieval robber-barons, in their castles on the Rhine, building churches and at the same time robbing passing merchants or plundering their neighbours. There were many such traits in Villa's character.
>
> 'General Obregon, who was the first to establish the New Mexico, and became its President, also recalled one of the romantic characters of the Middle Ages. His military revolution and *coup d'état* ended the nineteenth-century phase of Mexican history and brought Mexico into the twentieth century. He was the kind of military and intellectual leader one could imagine in Charlemagne's time.
>
> 'Being a young country also had its drawbacks. There, habit, tradition and the whole of the social background provides less of a support to the individual than is the case in the old countries of Europe. As a result a European is less apt to change in his lifetime and in any case has more to fall back upon in times of difficulty. In contrast, the Mexican when young has greater enthusiasm, greater vigour, and more faith in what he is doing, but once he reaches middle age, especially if he has had great good fortune or many misadventures, he may change radically. I had friends in Mexico who started by being radical, and who later turned very conservative; anti-Catholics, who became fervent Catholics, and alas! honest men who became dishonest. Also it often happened that a man who showed enormous promise when still in his forties fell to pieces when he became older. I knew two or three first-class people in Mexico who, on getting older, changed into profiteers, or became completely negative. Moreover, honest men, after achieving a position of importance, sometimes fell by the way.

'There is no doubt that cruelty is a trait of the Mexicans, as it was, I suppose, also of the men living in the Middle Ages. When families had often more than a dozen children and most died in infancy one can understand that life was cheap. President Calles once told me that the most beautiful day of his life was a Good Friday in, I believe, 1922, "when I hanged thirteen Generals"!

'I remember once walking in the street with a Mexican Member of Parliament who was hated by his enemies. Suddenly a man approached, saying "Now, you traitor, I am going to kill you", and shot him point blank! So far as I was able to find out later, the killer had no personal quarrel with his victim. Life was indeed cheap.

'It was only after 1920, following the deposition of President Caranza, that the Mexican people realized the necessity of making both a complete recovery from the disorders of their long series of revolutions, and formulating a national policy. What was most urgently needed was not a social and economic programme, but a national programme. The Mexicans wished to be masters in their own house, and what at that time was regarded abroad as a social revolution was in reality a national revolution, which implied freedom from outside interference in domestic affairs, and the necessity of developing a progressive national policy linked with the almost forgotten past.

'During my many visits to Mexico my motives were threefold. First, to understand the Latin American politics and Latin American psychology, which I thought could be observed just as well from Mexico as from anywhere else; secondly, once I knew and liked Mexico, to help the Mexicans, all the more as at that time – in the years between 1919 and the inauguration of the Good Neighbour policy in America – the situation of Mexico in her struggle with the "Colossus of the North" appeared to me to be similar to that of Poland in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it had to contend with Czarist Russia. Thirdly – and this to me was very important – I sought adventure, especially in the earlier period of my Mexican visits. I was young; during the War in Europe I had been associated with affairs which were generally left to people of more mature years and I was anxious to give rein to my own exuberance.

'During my first stay in Mexico I spent two or three months trying to learn something about the country and the people. I was guided by the new and valuable friend I had acquired on my trip from Spain, Luis Negrete Morones, and by friends of his. Morones was at that time in the middle thirties. He was tall, inclined to be stout, and his face was not particularly pleasant to look at because one of his eyes had been injured, and he could not move it. But his appearance would change completely when he was carried away by excitement, or making a speech. He was without doubt one of the best and most convincing speakers I have ever heard. Morones had outstanding qualities and made gigantic mistakes. He had not yet become the great force in Mexico that he was to be later. His friends were young, patriotic men of humble origin who desired to relieve the miserable conditions of Mexican labour. They also had the exuberance of youth and the zest of young idealists. Grouped round Morones, their leader and inspirer, were Celestino Casco, Salustio Hernandez, Indico Gutierrez, Flores Lopez Cortes, Ricardo Trevino, and a few others. Calling themselves an Action Committee, they formed a sort of benevolent secret society, and were passionately loyal to each other and to Morones who was their recognized chief. They were all more or less of my own age, that is to say between thirty and thirty-five, courageous, full of initiative, and ready for self-sacrifice. They created the first trade union movement in Mexico – and, indeed, one of the first in Latin America – under the name Confederacion Regional Obrera Mexicana, an organization which later became very influential. The CROM, as it was known, received much help from the then provisional President, Adolfo de la Huerta, and even more from the first constitutional President who succeeded him, General Obregon.

'Here is one incident typical of the youthful optimism of the founders of the Mexican labour movement. One day Morones needed ten thousand pesos for a big campaign he was about to start, but he only had three hundred pesos in his pocket. He was far from being a gambler, but as he knew no other means of raising the money, he went to a gambling den – and there were many in Mexico at that time. By the morning he had won his ten thousand.

'Morones and his friends were exceedingly kind to me, and gave me every opportunity to see all there was to be seen in Mexico, and to study every problem I wanted. They were almost as poor as I was, but they often paid for my trips and studies. Years later I learned that when they took me on my first trip round certain parts of

Mexico, they had to pass the hat round and collect literally their last pennies to cover the costs!

'In Mexico I had my first major adventure. I had been several months in the country, and was anxious to go to the United States, and from there back to Poland, which was at war with Communist Russia. By then I no longer had any passport. I had, of course, been admitted to Cuba, for which country no visa was required at that time, and as Mexico did not require visas either, I had had no trouble there, but if I wished to go to the United States I knew I would have to smuggle myself in.

'Morones and his friends told me this could be arranged. On the face of it it looked quite easy. There are about three thousand miles of frontier between Mexico and the United States, and the frontier was very sparsely populated on both sides. It was naturally impossible to guard the entire frontier, and quite a lot of smuggling went on. We thought it would be a comparatively simple matter to get me across, and Morones arranged through some friends of his to hire two smugglers to do the job.

'But when it came to carrying it out it didn't prove quite so easy as we had expected. We went to the appointed meeting place, where the two men were waiting. We were appalled at their appearance; two middle-aged, dirty fellows, one with only one eye, looking not only like regular bandits, but blackguards and scoundrels as well. Even Morones felt worried and tried to find out something more about them. He discovered that they had been convicted and the police were on the look out for them on both sides of the border. Morones threatened them that if anything happened to me they would certainly be found, on whichever side of the frontier they might be, and clapped into prison.

'Finally, after saying good-bye to my friends, I set out with my two guides on our long march. We left early in the morning. It was blazing hot, and we had to walk several miles across the desert. At one moment we were so thirsty that we decided to make a detour to a small ranchito kept by an old Indian woman. There we asked for a drink, and she led us to a big barrel full of goat's milk, covered with a thick coating of dust. In order to make it cleaner for us, the old woman pulled out her shirt, which was as dirty as one would have expected, and poured the milk through it. I was so thirsty I drank it. At that moment I couldn't help thinking that I was one

up on Joseph Conrad's uncle, of whom he wrote in his memoirs that he admired him for having eaten dog's flesh for several weeks.

'We eventually arrived at the Rio Bravo, which was very low as it was summer and my two smugglers said: "We leave you here. Pay us our thirty dollars and then you'll have to wade across the river." This was not difficult, as the river was shallow.

'It had been arranged that they would take me to San Antonio, but they said they didn't dare, and believing their fear to be genuine, I stripped, and with my bundle of clothing on my head I crossed the river. A horse-driven cart was supposed to be waiting for me on the main road, but when I reached the other side of the river no road could be seen. I had to push forward through the mesquite-bush, which tore my clothes to ribbons, and when I eventually found the main road I was in rags. I walked up and down for quite a long time looking for the guide who was supposed to be meeting me with the cart, but the only living thing I saw was a policeman. It was only too obvious that I had been smuggled over the border. I looked such a ragamuffin that he only asked me in somewhat nasty tones what I was doing. I replied in my Spanish, which in those days was not too good, that I was trying to see my "tio", a Mexican living in a neighbouring village. The policeman looked at me with contempt and speaking in excellent Spanish, said simply: "Oh, such a b—— couldn't do us any harm!" and let me go without further ado.

'Half an hour later I found the cart. Instead of driving me to San Antonio, as had been arranged, the guide took me to Laredo, the frontier town on the other side of the river down from Nuevo Loredo. In my rags I went to the railway station, asked for the Pullman conductor, to whom I paid double the cost of a sleeper to San Antonio, and three or four hours before the train left I got into my berth, and arrived at my destination without further trouble.

'At San Antonio I expected Morones to meet me, but I could not find him. After my Pullman ride I had less than a dollar left, so I thought I should take a room in an inn and wait for Morones. I was in despair at not meeting him. Anyway, with my last few nickels I bought some root beer – the first and only time I ever tasted it – since at that time Prohibition was still in force. It wasn't until the following day that I saw Morones, who helped me to buy a suit.

'From there I went to Washington, where I saw my friend, Felix Frankfurter, who was in a very high governmental position, and told him my adventures. He would not believe me, saying that the border was so well guarded that it was impossible for anybody to cross it. Anyway, he saw for himself that in spite of the difficulties I had indeed got to Washington. After leaving him I went to the Polish Legation, where my papers were put in order.

'About a year later, when General Obregon was President of Mexico, my friends in the Government asked me to go down to Mexico and help them. Since I felt that there was no interesting work for me to do in Europe just then, I accepted the invitation. My political activities in Mexico began only at that time.

'I never stayed in Mexico for long at a time. My longest stay lasted for nine months; generally I spent only a month or two, and used to come back to Europe in between visits. I think I came to know most of the Mexicans of importance, and most of the younger men who became important later. I was very careful not to become involved in the domestic politics of the country, and kept in close touch with everybody. My Mexican friends knew that I had no axe to grind and that I wasn't there to make money. As a matter of fact, in 1936, when I was leaving Mexico for good, President Calles gave a dinner for me, in the course of which he said, to my intense gratification, that I was the only foreigner who during his time had come to Mexico without a penny and was leaving without a penny. I therefore enjoyed their confidence, and they consulted me on many matters.

'Going back to an earlier period in Mexican history; in 1921, after I had come to know something of the country and its people, I was first asked to give my advice on political matters.

'The problem was first of all to define what were the needs of Mexico and agree on priorities. I believed, as indeed did the Mexicans themselves, that the first essential was freedom from interference in domestic matters by foreign Powers, especially the USA, and, to a lesser degree, Great Britain.

'I should like to stress that there were infinitely fewer difficulties then with Great Britain than there were with the United States, because Great Britain had no imperialistic aims in Mexico, was willing to compromise and in 1924 re-established diplomatic relations, broken since 1910, appointing an excellent Ambassador in the person of Sir Esmond Ovey. Full of wisdom, patience and tact, he had real sympathy for the Mexicans. He understood their needs and was anxious to help them, both because he liked the country and because that was

the policy of his Government at that time. His relationship with the Americans, cordial on the personal plane, was tinged on the business side with some suspicion, often fully justified. Later, Ovey became Ambassador to Moscow, and was unfortunate enough to be faced with the diplomatic crisis over the famous Vickers-Armstrong trial.

'On the American side, the Chargé d'Affaires – there was no Ambassador – was Mr F. Summerlin, who combined a second-rate intelligence with the attitude of the professional diplomat. He disliked the Mexicans, and favoured the "Big Stick" attitude, which might have succeeded in other times, but was certainly wrong at that time in Mexico. I knew him slightly, but felt in him a violent antipathy towards me, which was later translated into action. The other diplomatic representatives were of no great importance, with the possible exception of the French, and of the German Minister. The French attitude differed from that of the other representatives because of the very important French interests in Mexico. The main commerce in Mexico City and in the larger towns of the Republic was in the hands of the French, most of whom came from a small town in Savoy called Castellane and were named Castellonetes after it. I later met one of the members of the colony in France, the famous Senator Hannorat, who was the author of two important measures taken in France: the creation of the Cité Universitaire in Paris, and the institution of Summer Time, which was afterwards adopted by nearly all the European countries.

'The second essential thing in Mexico was to raise the standard of education. In 1920 the illiterates numbered over sixty per cent. The University of Mexico was the oldest on the American continent, and certainly rendered great services, but it did not suffice for the needs of a country which at that time had a population of over sixteen million. The standard of secondary education was extremely low.

'The next requirement was for good roads. When I arrived in Mexico the highways were often unusable, even near Mexico City, and as there were few railways, travel was very difficult. The country was infested with bandits; industrial development had not yet started; and the livelihood of the Indian peasant was precarious, to say the least, due primarily to the unfair distribution of land, to absentee ownership, and to the almost total lack of irrigation. The poverty of the natives was extreme, and the bulk of the wealth of the country was concentrated in the hands of foreigners and, secondly, of the Church and of a few hundred big families. On top of this, perennial revolutions were destroying the wealth of the country, and this state of unrest prevailed until almost the end of General Calles' presidency. Finally, Mexico at that time was completely isolated from the rest of the world. Diplomatic relations with the United States were practically non-existent, and were still very poor with Great Britain. There was as yet no kind of common bond between Latin American countries, unless it was the negative one of hatred towards North America. Another obstacle to the recovery of Mexico was the rabid, anti-clericalism and the persecution of Catholics in a country which was fundamentally Catholic. At that time the priority of these aims was somewhat confused but on the whole they worked out more or less in the order I have given them here.

'Foreign interference in Mexico's domestic affairs was ruthless and effective, especially that of the oil interests. At that time Mexico was the third most important oil-producing country in the world, after the United States and Russia. Ninety-seven per cent of the oil interest were owned by the Americans and British, the remaining three being in the hands of the Mexicans, who didn't know how to exploit the oil they had. One third of the budget came from oil revenues, and the oil interests had a strong influence on the Government. This would have been true even had the oil interests been fair and honest – and they were not. Large-scale bribery took place, especially by the Americans, and the oil companies in oil-producing areas, such as the State of Vera Cruz and Tamaulipas, had complete local control. Since there were revolutions nearly all the time in Mexico, the foreign oil companies had their own guerrilla troops, who of course not only defended their employer's property, but became a dominant military power in those two oil states, if not elsewhere. For instance, near Tampico there was a General named Pelaez reputed to have ten thousand soldiers, who not only protected the property of the American oil companies, but was strong enough to rule the States of Vera Cruz and Tamaulipas. The Central Government was often powerless, not only in the two States in question, but in other parts of the country as well. Of course, allowances must be made for the fact that most of the administration as then carried out by the Mexicans was not only corrupt, but inept. Banditry was rife and strike succeeded strike – although it must be said that these strikes were very often the expression of a genuine resistance by people who were

unmercifully exploited. But the root of the evil lay in the fact that foreigners or foreign governments interfered, using their financial power, in the domestic affairs of the country.

'The oil industry in Mexico was fairly new, and fantastic profits were being made by both British and American companies. The first oil was discovered by an American named Doheny and an Englishman who was well-known later as Lord Cowdray. The most important American Company was Huasteca, while the English one was Mexican Eagle (Aguila).

'From the Mexican Government's point of view, the annual oil revenue was, of course, a very big item, and this money had a big influence on political life. In these circumstances my advice to the Mexican Government was to nationalize oil, as the only way of eliminating foreign interference. The nationalization agreed upon was not due to economic factors, although these were to play some part, but to political conditions.

'It was of course wrong for the Mexican Government to nationalize without compensation, as they were to do later. But then it was due to the accumulated resentment against the oil companies, and the emergence of extremist and demagogic elements following the revolution. For the Mexicans the great example was the French Revolution, which expropriated without compensating the owners. They did not pause to think that nobody among them knew anything about the oil industry, its technology or organization.

'Young nations, like young men, are always confident, and often over-optimistic. This was the case with the Mexicans. They thought they could easily train Mexicans to run their oil, and that is why, even after nationalization, they would not allow any foreigner to work with them. Although I must confess that I was partly responsible for the idea of nationalization, I certainly had no say as to the way it was done.'

3

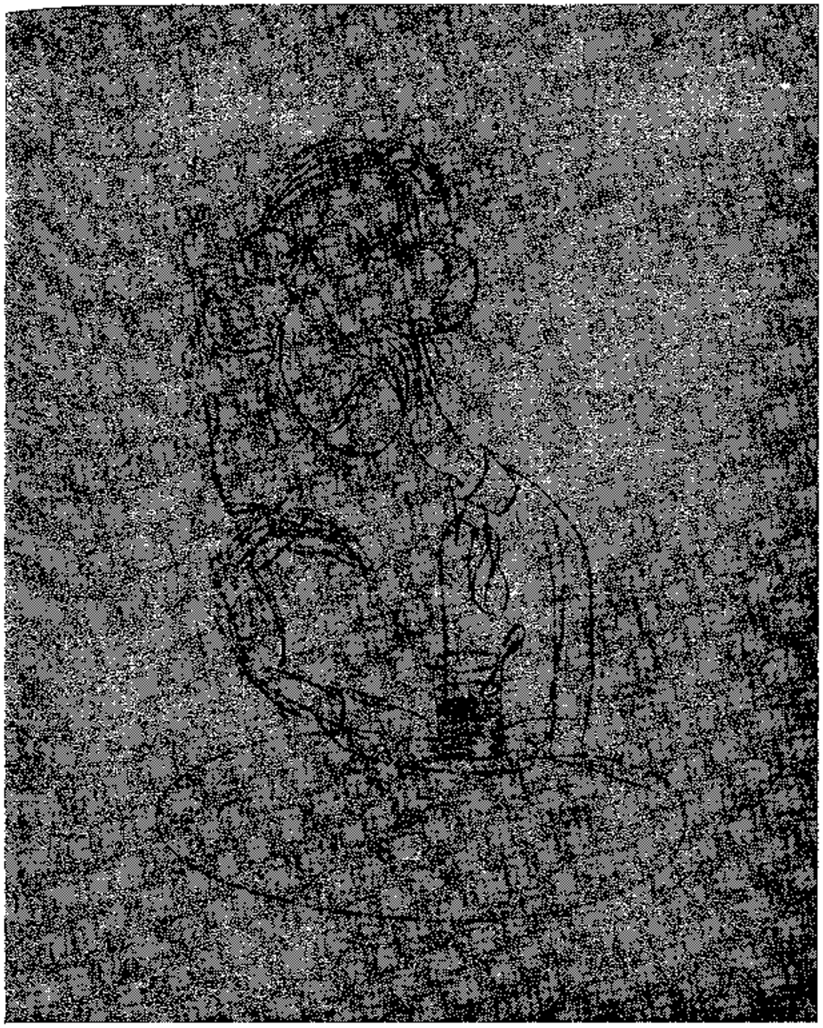
At that time Retinger became involved in one of the more colourful episodes in the troubled story of Mexican-American relations. At the end of 1925, when Calles was already President, a new Petroleum Code was introduced to the Mexican Parliament, limiting the possession of oil properties acquired before the 1917 Constitution to a period of fifty years. The oil companies denounced it as a preliminary step towards the nationalization of the industry. They pointed out that the new law contradicted certain assurances given earlier by Obregon, the previous President. Relations between Washington and Mexico deteriorated rapidly.

This is how Retinger related the part he played in this whole affair:

'The foreign oil companies reacted immediately and the American operators took the offensive under the leadership of Bill Green, Managing Director of Huasteca, who was strongly supported in Washington by Mr Fall, when he was Secretary of the Interior, and by President Harding himself. Tremendous pressure used to be exercised by Secretary Fall, who in due course was impeached as a result of the Teapot Dome scandal, and served a year in jail. He had an estate of a million acres in the State of Chihuaha, as well as other property. He was not a newcomer to Mexico, and his wealth in that country was enormous.

'The British companies followed the lead of the Americans, but no more, while the Ambassador, Sir Esmond Ovey, tried to reach a compromise. The war was absolutely ruthless on both sides; the Mexicans, who did not know how to handle the situation, were overdoing things and used brutal methods, and the Americans were pressing the Mexicans and using bribery and force. There is no doubt that by the end of 1925 and at the beginning of 1926 some American politicians wanted a free hand in the oil-bearing States, particularly Tamaulipas and Vera Cruz. Things went so far that the Mexicans suspected they wanted to annex the oilfields.

'To describe all the details of the pressure exercised would be too long a story, but I can recall several incidents I was personally involved in. One day General Calles, when he was President, called me to the Zacola and told me that a certain senator connected with the oil companies had arrived in Mexico and wanted to talk to him. Calles was sure that bribes would be mentioned during the conversation, and he asked me to be present. The talk was very brief, and the President told the senator that he had better continue with me to prepare the ground for later lengthier conversation with him. The senator did not waste much time in letting me know that he had thirteen million dollars at his disposal which, if a satisfactory arrangement could be made, could be used for any purpose the President might like to name. Of course, I refused to continue the talk, and



1. Retinger in Mexico, c. 1925, drawn by Diego Rivera

reported to General Calles accordingly. I do not claim that Calles was an angel, but he had a great sense of dignity and of national interest, and he was rather pleased to hear the rude answer I had given to the senator.

'I must add that a few weeks later there arrived in Mexico from the United States a quick-witted journalist, who in a more tactful and diplomatic way tried to achieve the same results. I am afraid he succeeded with a few people but not with the leaders of the Government.

'The Mexicans were feeling the threat of the "big stick" and they genuinely feared the Americans would annex some of their territory.

'Just before Christmas 1925 I had a long talk with the British Ambassador, who thought the Mexicans were crazy to resist American demands, which, he said, would certainly grow stronger. He added: "It is just like a man standing on the railway line and trying to stop an engine running at full speed. The Mexicans must lose."

'It was then that President Calles told me that the Mexicans had, after all, a hidden weapon. It consisted of voluminous archives containing about five thousand papers from the correspondence between the American Government and its Embassy in Mexico City, together with a mass of documents from the State Department. There were hundreds of originals and thousands of photostatted copies. A prominent member of the American Embassy and one of the most important officials of the State Department had been selling these secrets to the Mexicans for over a year. The papers revealed the existence of a conspiracy by the American oil men and various financiers to coerce Mexico, mobilizing for this purpose the power of their Government.

'President Calles asked me to go through these archives and see what could be done. I spent the Christmas of 1925 working day and night on the documents, and soon realized their tremendous value to the Mexicans. I therefore suggested that they be communicated to Mr Herbert Hoover, Secretary for Commerce and Industry, who was a member of the Harding Administration and trusted by everybody, and that he should be invited to take whatever action he thought appropriate in the interests of the United States and of Mexico. I further suggested that I should be sent to Washington to tell him the facts and consult him on the solution of the problems dividing the two countries. Naturally, a direct approach to a man who was considered to be one of the most honest of American statesmen was not reckoned with by those who, for financial profit or for political reasons, wished to bring about a crisis in American-Mexican affairs.

'After lengthy consultations with President Calles I left Mexico on my mission to Washington. On my arrival in St Louis, Missouri, I was arrested by the American police and thrown into jail. For seventeen days I was kept incommunicado, which was contrary to the laws of the State, and I was never able to discover what was the reason for my arrest. In the course of the proceedings it appeared that the pretext was that I was not really Joseph Retinger. Of course, it would have been easy to identify me, as I had been to the United States on several occasions and was known to a number of people. Moreover, the authorities could have got in touch with the Polish Legation in Washington. The Minister, Prince Lubomirski, being an old acquaintance of mine, could easily have identified me. I did not see a lawyer for seventeen days and I was not allowed to communicate with anybody outside the prison.

'I must admit that, like all the prisoners, I received very decent treatment, and had no complaints on that score. The St Louis State Jail was a very clean, modern building. A long corridor connected the cells, each of which accommodated two prisoners. The part of the building I was in was called a "tier". There were thirty-six prisoners altogether. I was quite astonished to see how clean the prisoners kept themselves, nearly all of them taking a shower bath every day. The food was abominable, but every prisoner could shop in the canteen. For the first seventeen days I could not do this because my money had been confiscated but later I was allowed to draw some and could buy some food. During the earlier period my fellow prisoners were very kind, and shared their extra food with me.

'I was amazed to discover that they were allowed to get not only food from outside, but any quantity of spirits (it was during Prohibition). Moreover, those who were dope addicts could get drugs without difficulty. A dose of cocaine or morphia cost one dollar. For some reason unknown to me they could not get hypodermic needles. However, in order not to do without their drugs, they punctured their arms with a nail, and let the drug drip into this small wound.

'One thing surprised me very much, and that was the relationship between the honest and the dishonest world, between the prisoners and the men outside – warders, jailers, chaplains, and even the judge, who came to visit us once or twice. The difference between legality and illegality was not very clear, and the men outside seemed to regard the prisoners as people who had been unlucky, rather than criminals. So far as I could see, no moral stigma attached to the prisoners. I remember hearing a talk between the judge and two murderers, which was most friendly; they all called each other by their Christian names, and the judge handed out cigars.

'Our only occupation was playing rummy, and the men outside often played with us. A corridor separated the rest of the prison from the cells, and the game went on (for money, of course) the whole day across the grill between prisoners and jailers.

'The prisoners were well behaved on the whole, but if they didn't like the look of a newcomer they would rob him, and then quarrel among themselves over the spoils.

'One of the prisoners was a little man named Jack Jacobsen, who was in for theft. One day a tall, husky fellow quarrelled with him, and smacked his face with such force that I heard his teeth fall with a loud noise on the stone floor. There was, of course – as I understand there is in every jail – a kangaroo court. After a few days I was elected to be its chairman, and had to preside over disputes of this kind among the prisoners.

'From St Louis I was transferred to Houston. The policeman in mufti who took me from one prison to the other (he also carried my money) gave me the impression that he, too, considered the criminal as a man who had been unlucky enough to be caught. Of course, he did not know what I was "in" for, but he treated me very decently, and had I wanted to I could have escaped a hundred times during the trip. But I suspected, rightly or wrongly, that this leniency was shown to me in order to tempt me to escape, in which case they would have had a real charge against me. Anyway, on our arrival at Houston in the morning the policeman said that we would not go to the jail until the evening, and would spend the day walking round Houston. I quite enjoyed this, as it was then a charming little town. We also had a good lunch and dinner. My escort took me to a lawyer who, he said, was his brother mason in Houston. He didn't give me any good advice, but charged me twenty dollars.

'The Houston jail was terribly dirty. I had a very poor bunk; its steel springs had no mattress to cover them and I was given only one blanket. To add to my misery there were millions of bed-bugs. I didn't know what to do about them, as they were inside the springs. I eventually hit on the plan of starting a fire by lighting some newspapers under the berth, and the bugs dropped into the fire in their hundreds. But hundreds more kept on appearing. The jail was also infested by rats. I had nothing with me except my suit and hat, and the only thing the rats fancied was the leather band inside the hat. I used to lay the hat on the bed at night, and the rats would get on to the bed and try to eat the band. One of them was particularly obstinate. Whenever I woke I found him trying to get at the leather, and when I chased him away he ran just outside the grill and sat there waiting his opportunity.

'The negroes and the whites were, of course, separated. On the floor my cell was on there were only white men, and on the floor below only negroes.

'There was a great deal of freedom in the Houston prison – even more than in the St Louis Jail. All the white prisoners could get together and do practically whatever they liked. They could, as in St Louis, get food, drugs and spirits from outside. The prisoners were men already condemned, but their relationship with the jailers was more than friendly; I would even say cordial. I was taken round the jail and shown everything, including the death cell, which I must say I found disgusting. In Texas executions were by hanging. The death cell adjoined the place where prisoners were hanged. The worst features of the whole business were that, according to the law in Texas, the condemned man was not told when he was going to be hanged; he simply knew that a date had been fixed and that it would happen within a certain number of days or weeks.

'During the three weeks I spent in Houston nobody was condemned to death. Most of the prisoners had already been sentenced. They were always in good spirits, and kept up a regular flow of talk and jokes the whole day long. The most interesting was a dope-peddlar serving a short sentence. He despised drug addicts, although he made his living out of them. He was a little Polish Jew who no longer spoke Polish. His name was Hirschberg. He was the life and soul of every party, continually cracking jokes, and mimicking all the famous actors.

'After a few weeks I was transferred to Laredo, and a few days later I saw the Federal Judge who, after a very brief talk told me that in his view I was both legally and morally innocent. We then shook hands and I left his office.

'In the corridor I was again arrested on the charge of being a burden on the American Administration, and I was told that the authorities must find out more about me before releasing me. I pointed out that I had arrived in the States with fifteen hundred dollars which had of course, been taken but deposited for me with the jail authorities. It would certainly have been sufficient to cover the cost of my stay in the US. Nevertheless, I was kept under arrest for a further month and had the freedom of the small country jail.

'I should add that when my Mexican friends found that I was in prison, without any criminal charge made against me, they tried to have me released on bail. The judge fixed the amount of the bail at five thousand dollars, and the following day one of my Mexican friends brought him the money. The judge then said the amount had been raised to ten thousand dollars. On the third day this sum was handed to the judge, who then said that the amount had been raised to fifteen thousand. He added the private information that he intended to go on increasing the amount of the bail so that my friends would be unable to pay it. The only possible explanation was that my opponents were trying to keep me out of circulation for the time necessary for them to complete their schemes. Then one day I was suddenly and unexpectedly released, and since Laredo is on the border I walked across, back to Mexico.'

4

And so the attempt failed. Retinger's planned trip to Washington must have been known and his opponents made sure he would be stopped.

In the meantime, the pressure on the Mexican Government was mounting and the situation worsened. There came a point in 1927 when President Calles was faced with a virtual ultimatum. Somewhere down the list of the demands there was even a request to expel Retinger. Time was pressing and a different plan was quickly hatched.

Retinger went to see the British Ambassador, Sir Esmond Ovey, with whom he was on friendly terms. He told him of the documents the Mexicans had accumulated during the past couple of years, and which proved among others, that Frank Kellog, the Secretary of State, and Sheffield, the American Ambassador in Mexico, were trying to provoke some act to serve as a pretext for armed intervention. The pattern of the intrigues and the corruption of officials could be proven, and in the States, where the memories of the Teapot Dome conspiracy were still fresh, a new scandal would certainly prove disastrous for the administration. In fact, said Retinger, some London newspapers had already been tipped off and the Mexican government was thinking of giving them the facts. The matter, however, was negotiable.

This talk had its desired effect; it was duly reported to the American Embassy and the storm quickly subsided. President Coolidge, who was duly informed of the whole affair, dismissed Sheffield and promptly appointed a personal friend of his, Dwight Morrow, as a new Ambassador. The following anecdote noted by Retinger illustrates the change:

> 'When Dwight Morrow arrived in Mexico as Ambassador, he at once tried to get in touch with me, and asked Sir Esmond Ovey to bring us together. On one occasion when I went to the British Embassy I was told that Morrow had invited me to lunch the same day. Since up to then I had met with no courtesy at the American Embassy, I refused to go, which embarrassed poor Ovey. He then telephoned Morrow, in my presence, and told him that I did not want to go to the Embassy, but that I should be honoured to meet him. Morrow asked to speak to me, and said: "Doc, I must see you as soon as possible: if you don't want to come here ask Ovey to invite me to lunch with you at the British Embassy." This was arranged, and when Morrow arrived he again addressed me as "Doc", telling me that he wanted to be sure that America was doing the right thing in Mexico, and would like my advice. His quick decisions certainly helped him in Mexico, and ensured that while he was there things went more smoothly and the Mexicans no longer regarded the United States as the Poles regarded the Colossus of the North. Thanks to Morrow, the relations between Mexico and the United States improved enormously.'

However well the misunderstandings between the two countries might have been cleared, in the eyes of some Washington departments, Retinger's books were blotted. Dwight Morrow became a friend but there were many people who would not forget Retinger's activities. When in the course of time administrations and people changed, files remained, and for a very long time, now and again, he met with seemingly inexplicable hostility and suspicion. In 1941, when he wanted to accompany General Sikorski, the Polish Prime Minister, on his first visit to President Roosevelt – virtually a State occasion – his visa was refused, without explanation. Sikorski, whose feeling for the dignity of his office was no less than that of General de Gaulle, took it as an insult both to his Government and to himself and threatened to cancel the trip.

The visa was duly granted but in Washington, Sumner Welles, who was then Under-Secretary of State, called Ambassador Edward Raczynski, a member of Sikorski's party, to his office and explained that Retinger, a 'Mexican agent', was a most undesirable and suspicious character. He had a whole file on him and it was obvious that he was a 'fellow traveller'. However, the combined efforts of Raczynski and Anthony Drexel Biddle, the then American Ambassador to the Polish Government, succeeded in putting matters right. From then on there was no more noticeable official trouble, though here and there a lingering doubt remained. However, during the last war he made many friends among America's leaders and their friendship stood him in good stead ever after.

5

It is hard to keep track of all Retinger's movements in the twenties and the early thirties. He travelled a lot, living mostly in hotels and kept few records. He also had many failures and disappointments. Altogether, until the outbreak of the War in 1939 he had a hard and often bitter life. In the midst of it all, however, we find the seeds of his future activities.

At the beginning of the twenties, Mexico was his chief concern. The new government needed assistance and welcomed honest advice. Retinger had wide interests and over the years took a hand in a variety of problems: arts, popular education, roads and communications and a variety of economic subjects. He also wrote a book on the system of land tenure before the Spanish Conquest. Later he used to joke about it, as it sold only a handful of copies, all to university libraries. In his papers there are traces of more important matters. There are memoranda on a number of economic problems, among others on the setting up of a National Economic Council, on the oil industry, on the setting up of a statistical service, and so on. But his chief concern was with the

problems Mexico faced in its dealings with the outside world. His contributions to the oil disputes were a fringe activity. Far more important was that broad field, stretching beyond official diplomacy, for which no adequate word has been coined.

Mexico had a bad press and this was a great drawback as the country was in need of foreign capital, foreign know-how, and assistance over a wide range of problems. The image which it conveyed was one of constant unrest and of unending revolution. Moreover, the Governments of Obregon and Calles were strongly radical. Their programmes were socialistic and, even though only partially implemented, could frighten opinion in Europe and the States, already on the alert as a result of the Russian revolution. Somehow, that had to be put right as Mexico needed help.

On the other hand, the radicalism of the Mexican Government attracted the sympathy of the socialists and trade unionists abroad. They were potential allies, if only they could be contacted and informed. And that is where Retinger concentrated his efforts. Till well into the thirties he travelled back and forth, acting in Europe as a sort of unofficial Mexican representative, organizing contacts, visits, exhibitions, attending congresses and meetings, sounding politicians, informing the press. He organized, for instance, a visit to Mexico in 1924 by a group of Labour leaders from the International Federation of Trade Unions, which included Jimmy Thomas and Frank Hodges, and another in 1926 with Purcell and Ben Smith from England, Léon Jouhaux from France, Karl van Durr from Switzerland, Cudegeest and Fimmen from Holland, Zulawski from Poland and several prominent leaders from other countries. Tomsky from Russia was due to come, but in the end did not. He also accompanied Calles and Morones to Germany and France.

In 1926 he caused the formation of a Labour Party Parliamentary Committee for Mexico, which included among others his personal friends Ben Smith, Purcell, Ponsonby, Trevelyan and Lansbury. A similar committee was planned in France by his friend de Monzie. Somewhat earlier he set up in Mexico a news service which was in fact concerned with press publicity. He wrote a book on Morones, published in 1926, full of praise for his friends and his companions, which strikes the present-day reader with the full blast of early socialist clichés no longer in use.

He did not, however, limit himself to socialist circles. At one time he even went on a mission to Rome, to try to bring about a settlement in the struggle between Church and State in Mexico.

The closeness of his association with Mexico is shown by the fact that in spite of the subsequent leadership changes, Retinger was nominated as the sole delegate of the CROM to the World Trade Union Congress, held in London in February 1945, notwithstanding that at that time he was an official of the Polish Government in exile.

Apart from all else he loved Mexico and the Mexicans. He felt at home in that country and liked going there, though after a while the call of Europe always made itself felt. In a letter to Zulawski in October 1925, he wrote: 'I am contented here. People like me, they don't intrigue against me and above all else are extremely loyal. It's a young country, in which one can do a lot, and where initiatives are welcome. With it all I long after Europe and the companionship of people who share my interests.'

A perusal of his papers from the twenties, however fragmentary a picture they yield, makes it clear that he was on good terms with all the principal Trade Union leaders who were interested in foreign affairs. He was also in close touch with socialist politicians, particularly in England, where he made many friends. Among others Arthur Henderson, E. D. Morel, Hugh Dalton, Ben Smith, A. A. Purcell and Arthur Ponsonby. Then there was also Marion Phillips, but their friendship, which was particularly close and intimate, had a romantic undertone.

In Mexico Retinger's friends were radical and Labour, and so were the people abroad from whom he sought support. Among them he also tried to find allies for other causes he wanted to promote, such as the Unity of Europe.

> 'In 1924, [wrote Retinger] I became imbued with the idea of the unity of Europe.
>
> 'Being much younger, I believed in a direct approach, and with E. D. Morel, whose daughter I married after his death, for the first time I started to discuss it seriously. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, certain ideas were successfully promoted by a kind of open conspiracy of people in different countries and I thought we should use a similar method. Morel and I thought about men like Lutz in Germany, Benedetto Croce in Italy, Seymour Cocks in Britain, who could join in a semi-clandestine organization working for the unity of Europe. Alas! After defeating Winston Churchill

> in the 1925 election at Dundee, E. D. Morel suddenly died, and my possibilities of furthering this juvenile idea came to an end.
>
> 'During the next two years, I thought of another approach. Facts must prove that the unity of Europe was the only solution for European economic problems and the only way to prevent wars. Perhaps to start with, one could launch some kind of encyclopaedia, showing by way of example how much the idea of the unity of Europe was in line with the evolution of Europe. I had at that time the willing help of quite a number of members of the Labour Party, particularly Marion Phillips, George Middleton, Ellen Wilkinson, C. T. Cramp, Frank Hodges, Graham Poole, and others. Abroad I was supported by Fimmen and Jouhaux. Together we drew up a plan for this encyclopaedia, which thus came to have a substantial backing. We thought that the man who would have a true understanding of the matter was Ernest Bevin, the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union.
>
> 'A meeting was arranged for me with Bevin, whose offices at that time were in the neighbourhood of St Martin's-in-the-Fields, and I was introduced by my great friend, Dr Marion Phillips, who was not yet a Member of Parliament, but acted as chief woman officer of the Labour Party. Bevin looked then exactly as he did during the War; strong, powerful, sure of himself and of his ideas, knowing what he wanted. However, he was still nothing more than a great Trade Union leader. Unlike the Secretary General of the International Transport Union, Edo Fimmen, he had no experience of international politics. He had only very general ideas about the fraternity of peoples. However, he had not got the isolationist spirit, then so prevalent in England, and liked the idea of some unity among Europeans, but at the same time he disliked too much theory. I emphasized the serious aspect of an encyclopaedia of European affairs, but he was not interested and flatly refused to co-operate. That was the end of my plans concerning the unity of Europe for a long time to come.
>
> 'I tried from time to time to raise the matter in the Trade Union Congresses, held between 1924 and the Second World War, but always with complete lack of success. I am afraid that at that time international organizations evoked interest only in so far as they benefited national interests. The American Federation of Labour, for instance, left the International Trade Union Federation mainly

because, according to them, the American Trade Unions were not given sufficient voice in the international movement. The British, German and French, to a lesser degree, thought only about their own importance within those international movements, and I fear the same was true of the Co-operative international movement. This certainly was the case within the League of Nations.'

6

In the midst of all this Poland was not forgotten. Having somewhat rebuilt his position and re-established certain contacts and connections Retinger was in a better position to return to political life in his own country.

He had been absent when the Allies were reshaping Europe and organizing the peace. He was absent from Poland when a new State was being formed. He missed the War the Poles fought with Soviet Russia in 1919–20. He missed all the decisive events which took place at that time and which were to determine the shape of post-war Europe. Being absent, he was largely forgotten. Moreover, however good the reasons might have been, he had not been at his post when most needed. For a diplomat, it was nothing to boast about. And so when the dust settled, unless he wanted to start again from scratch, he had to come back with some assets and something to show for himself.

His work for Mexico was too remote to have any impact in Poland. On the other hand, his knowledge, his contacts and his standing among socialists and Labour leaders in Western Europe and America was certainly something which could be of great value.

There are few records of what he did in 1920 and 1921. Thanks to Felix Frankfurter he was allowed entry into the United States and he could travel with his Polish passport and paid several visits to Poland. Shortly after the War the French lifted their ban, but he had to wait until 1924 when Arthur Henderson became Home Secretary before he could finally clear his books in England. He told me that when he went to see him about it Henderson pointed to a big pile of police reports on his desk all relating to Retinger. They laughed about it and Henderson had them all destroyed.

Among his notes the earliest record of anything important occurring was the following comment on a visit to Poland in the company of his trade union friend Edo Fimmen. It proved to be of great importance for a later part of his life.

'I first met General Sikorski in Switzerland in the late autumn of 1916. At that time he was responsible for recruiting volunteers in Poland for the so-called Polish Legion, and I was representing the interests of the Poles in England and France. I met him a second time in Warsaw in 1923 after he had become Prime Minister of Poland for the first time. I had gone there with the late Edo Fimmen, at that time one of the General Secretaries of the International Federation of Trade Unions, to try to find out if there was any truth in the rumour that Sikorski was contemplating a fresh crusade against Soviet Russia and, if there was, to sound a note of warning. Needless to say, we came away convinced that the rumours were untrue. It was on this occasion that after a lengthy discussion with Sikorski on international politics and social problems, Fimmen said to me in frank astonishment and with real respect: "This chap is really an honest dealer."

'This conversation was the beginning of my friendship with Sikorski and of our collaboration in many aspects of Polish politics, mostly foreign affairs, for at that time I was living abroad. I came to admire Sikorski more than any other Polish politician, so much so that I, who had never been tied to any man or any party organization in 1939 accepted him as my leader and loyally worked with him and carried out his line of policy, vehement though our arguments over many details often were. (On six different occasions I tendered my resignation!) I trusted his political instinct, his gift of leadership, his faultless honesty.'

Sikorski was an exceptional man. An engineer and an officer in the Imperial Austrian Army for several years he was one of the organizers of the para-military semi-clandestine organizations which grew in the Austrian part of Poland before the First World War. Their aims were vague. They were inspired by hope, rather than by calculation. Speaking at a public lecture in Paris early in 1914, Pilsudski, with whom Sikorski joined forces said: 'The Polish question will be favourably solved in the happy event if Germany defeats Russia and is itself defeated by France.' Pilsudski, a socialist revolutionary who had been active in Russia, had no doubt that it would collapse as a result of a revolution. But all this was a very long shot indeed. Nevertheless he and his companions knew instinctively that somehow or other, in time of war and revolution which, sooner or later, had to come, Poles would have to fight to achieve their aims. When that moment came, armed forces must be on hand. And so, during the War, wherever they were, Poles started forming separate Polish detachments. By the time the War was coming to an end, there were Polish units in Germany, in Russia, in Austria and in France, and history proved them right.

Revolution indeed broke out in Russia in 1917. A short-lived peace was concluded at Brest-Litovsk in February 1918. Nothing was said about Poland, which consequently remained within the German realm. A few weeks before, however, President Wilson had published his fourteen points, the thirteenth of which called for the creation of an independent Poland with access to the Baltic. In June, Britain, France and Italy endorsed it. In October, Austria collapsed and in November Germany surrendered. Throughout these months the situation in Poland was fluid. But because by then Polish armed units were present, the Poles could make sure of their long-lost independence. The new State was reborn in Warsaw, though its frontiers were undefined. Both in the East against Russia and in the West against Germany, they had to be fought for. The nation, under the leadership of Pilsudski, who assumed power, fought for the next two years, while the State was getting on its feet. In these turbulent years military leaders played a leading part.

War with Russia started as a result of the fighting in the south-eastern part of the country, inhabited by a mixed Polish and Ukrainian population, which in the olden days had belonged to the Polish Crown. It soon became more than a frontier dispute.

In January 1920 Lenin made a generous offer to Poland fixing the frontier along a line running from Polock in the north to Bar in the south. But Pilsudski had different ideas. By that time Ukrainians, led by Petlura, wanted to set up an independent State, while in Eastern Ukraine General Wrangel at the head of White Russian armies was attacking the Soviets. Pilsudski intervened and his troops reached Kiev on 7 May. The Soviet Government reacted promptly and vast armies under Marshall Toukhatchevsky took the offensive. Their aim was no longer Poland alone. In Hungary the Communist Bela Kun seized power, while Germany was on the brink of revolution. Lenin and Trotsky felt that the whole of central Europe and possibly other areas as well were ripe for a revolutionary take-over if only the Soviet armies could reach them.

Under the onslaught the Poles caved in. The Soviet armies were approaching the line of the Vistula. But, on 15 August, the miracle happened. Sikorski, commanding the 5th Army Group, brought a sharp stop to the main Soviet thrust north of Warsaw. Three days later

Pilsudski led a counter-stroke from the south. The Soviet offensive collapsed and their troops began a hurried retreat. Within a few months the War was ended and early in 1921 a peace treaty was concluded in Riga. The new frontier was well to the West of the original Soviet offer of a year before.

The sharp clash was to cast a deep shadow on relations between Poland and Russia. Mutual suspicion prevailed. The Russians remembered that the Poles had intervened in the civil war and in the Ukraine, while the Poles knew that the Soviets had tried to impose bolshevism in Poland by force of arms. Also as a result of the victory the Poles tended to regard themselves as a bulwark against Soviet Russia and to underrate its strength. In later years they were to pay heavily for this mistake.

For a while at the beginning of the twenties Marshal Pilsudski ruled the country. By temperament an autocrat, he nevertheless wanted Poland to be a democratic country. And so it was. But the system was too fragile; traditions too short and the problems too great. We know now that goodwill alone is not enough to make a parliamentary system of government work. The mechanism has to be tried and adjusted and strong traditions created. After a hundred and fifty years the Polish State had suddenly burst forth and it stood on shaky legs. Soon trouble started. One after another governments fell, while parliamentary majorities melted, congealed, and melted again.

Sikorski was the Chief of Staff. In December 1922, following the assassination of the newly elected President Narutowicz by a madman, he was called upon to become the Prime Minister. It was a dangerous moment and Sikorski succeeded in calming the country. Within nine months he was defeated, but later became Minister of Defence and remained in that post until 1925. When in May 1926, in order to restore stability, Pilsudski made his *coup d'état*, Sikorski's sympathies were with the legal government. In the following years Sikorski, still in the army, was placed in semi-retirement. His hour was to come with the outbreak of the next War.

Since he had renewed his acquaintance with him in 1923, Retinger kept in close touch with Sikorski, saw him frequently, and during the thirties they became increasingly close. When Sikorski was still in the government Retinger undertook various tasks in London. These had to do with the development of economic and political links between Poland and Britain. There were, among others, soundings concerning the floating of a loan of fifty million pounds, and various other economic projects, none of which, however, seemed to have made much headway. There was also a whole series of visits and contacts of all sorts which he initiated and sponsored.

Whereas there was a tradition of close relations between Poland and France, and French influence was great, relations with Britain were scant. Retinger tried by every means to build them up. If one day the history of the relations between Great Britain and Poland between the Wars is written, it will have to include an important chapter concerned with his activities.

Of that none of the Polish ambassadors seems to have been aware. Perhaps they did not wish to know. Certainly they did not want to give him credit for it. This is not surprising as Retinger was always behind the scenes, never attracted the limelight and from 1926 was deep in opposition.

In the early twenties he established close relations with the Polish Socialist Party and the trade union movement. Again he singled out men with whom he found a close rapport and who were to be his principal partners for many years to come. One of them was Zygmunt Zulawski who was one of the principal labour and trade union leaders, a man of great stature and character – whom Retinger described as 'a demagogic speaker, a philosophic thinker, and a man of the most magnificent courage'. The other was Mieczyslaw Niedzialkowski, Vice Chairman of the party and editor of the *Robotnik*, the socialist party daily.

And so Retinger again began to play a part in Polish politics. From 1924 to 1928 he was a member of the National Executive of the Socialist Party. At one time he was even put up for Parliament but failed to get in. But his main interest lay with external relations and, as of 1924 for several years, he acted as the representative of the Polish Socialist Party in Great Britain. All this started when he initiated and organized the visit to England of both Zulawski and Niedzialkowski which, after long preparation, took place in March 1924. By then, in Britain, Labour was in power and the round of talks and visits involved most of the Government – three-quarters of which were in any case Retinger's personal friends.

Beforehand a number of Labour leaders, in particular Marion Phillips, went to reconnoitre in Poland and came back with favourable reports. But a number of reservations remained, some of which were rooted in

insularity and some in pro-Soviet sentiments within the Labour Party. Poles had to live down the Polish-Russian war of 1920. Western socialists were not too sure of their Eastern comrades. Most of this was put right during the most successful visit of Niedzialkowski and Zulawski. Other visits followed to cement the good relations established at that time which proved of enormous value in the years to come when the Polish socialists went into opposition and were hard pressed by the régime.

An amusing thing is that even then Retinger was never a card-carrying member of the party. Of course he did not boast about it, and few people were aware of it, since his membership was taken for granted. His relations with the leading people were so close, they confided in him so completely, that nobody thought otherwise. As some old cuttings from the Polish press show, he was also believed to be a member of the British Labour Party, which was of course equally untrue.

That this was so was mainly due, I believe, to his impish character, a penchant for the unusual, his love of independence, rather than a deliberate policy. It is hard to imagine in what way it could affect him, identified as he was with the socialist milieu. However that may be, all his life he wanted to be, and indeed was, a completely free agent – a man apart. He could become the most devoted friend and the most loyal collaborator of men he chose for their intrinsic qualities, independently of their political attachments and beliefs. He could be a most passionate advocate of good causes – never of ideologies – ready to sacrifice everything for their success. But to be tied up in any way with an organisation, to accept the discipline of a corporate and hence de-personalised body as distinct from a direct human relationship was, to him, perfectly abhorrent. So much so that never in his life did he join any club, however innocuous it might have been, unless it was in a temporary and honorary capacity.

Judging by his writings in the twenties and the thirties, Retinger was certainly a fervent socialist. All the vocabulary is there to prove it. At the same time he never was much interested in internal matters, concentrating his attention on foreign affairs which he held to be in the long run of far greater import in this interdependent world. Maybe the reason was also his cursory knowledge and understanding of economics and of law. He never felt very much at ease when any such subject was discussed, while his heart went out to humanities – particularly where psychology, art and history converged.

International affairs were, he thought, of prime importance, particularly for Poland, a newly emerged and vulnerable country. Its internal progress and economic development depended on whether it kept in tune with the advanced countries in the West and enjoyed a good reputation and benefited from their confidence. Its security, wedged as it was between powerful and threatening neighbours, depended on its good foreign relations and the kind of international order prevailing in Europe. In relation to Russia, Retinger saw Poland as a bridge rather than a bulwark. He believed in the closest political and economic cooperation with all the States of Central Europe and, in particular, Poland's neighbours to the south and to the north. In one of the rare remaining articles on that subject, sometime in 1926, he wrote:

> 'In regard to Poland's foreign policy, the Polish people must no longer regard themselves as friends or foes of this country or that. They must improve their relations with Germany, with Russia (whatever their politics may be) and with Czechoslovakia. The friction between Poland and Lithuania must be brought to an end and a settlement arrived at on terms that will be satisfactory to Lithuania, to whom Poland can well afford to be generous.
>
> 'Above all, Poland is destined to be a powerful factor in breaking down the policy of the European balance of power. Poland owes her independence to the fact that she forms a unit, economic, political and ethnographical, and that all countries have felt the necessity of re-establishing Poland as a free nation. Poland cannot be dependent on an international treaty for her existence. She is now a free nation amongst free nations and her friendship with France must not be shadowed by any suspicion in Great Britain or in Italy that this friendship binds her to the policy of the Quai d'Orsay. This is practical common sense, since the welfare and happiness of both France and Poland depends not on the strength of military or diplomatic alliances, but on the maintenance of peace in Europe. Above all things the aim of Polish diplomacy must be to uphold the League of Nations, and in the strength of a United League must she find the fulfilment of her political aims.'

There might not be anything that would seem very striking to the present day reader in these views, though they were by no means universally accepted at that time. They indicate the broad lines of his

thinking and foreshadow the policies that he was to pursue later. But more important was the fact that he worked towards these ends.

Following Pilsudski's *coup d'état* in May 1926, the Opposition in Poland, and that included the Socialist Party and the trade unions, needed help from abroad. As years went by the régime became more authoritarian and the democracy more and more tightly 'controlled'. Now and again Opposition leaders were put in jail, strikes suppressed, press laws tightened, elections tampered with and all kinds of pressures exerted. In 1930 a number of Opposition parliamentary leaders were imprisoned and treated roughly. Retinger was kept busy organizing support in the West, alerting the press, causing questions to be raised in Parliament, organizing visits of Poles to Britain and of Britons to Poland, and on several occasions was instrumental in getting people released from jail.

As his correspondence proves, he was in close and intimate touch not only with the Socialists, but also with the Peasant leaders, Witos and Kot, the Christian Labour leaders, Korfanty, Haller and Popiel and, of course, with General Sikorski. Some of them went into exile – to Czechoslovakia, to Switzerland and France – and he visited them frequently on his trips from London to Warsaw. Needless to say, he was not always very popular with the Polish Administration.

Many rumours were spread about him and found credence which has persisted to this day. He never bothered to deny any of them or waste his time fighting slander or libel. This attitude remained with him all his life, partly because he thought it was somehow beneath him to do so and partly because it was futile and would only give them publicity. It is easy to understand that to many Poles he was a mysterious figure, always on the move, connected with a disconcerting variety of affairs and having an inexplicably diversified array of important friends. To what mafia, what secret service did he belong? What mysterious interests were behind him? Who was he really working for? Such dark suppositions appealed to many minds. At one time or another he was accused of working for every conspiracy recorded by popular legends. If he had had any money they would surely have been more widely believed than they were. As it was, for most of the time he was as poor as a church mouse.

7

Retinger's first marriage fell to pieces during the War and he obtained a divorce. There was also mention of an annulment which was not taken very seriously, either by his wife or by his friends. He had some passionate love affairs, traces of which remain in his correspondence, and, judging from it, he must have been attractive to a few well-known blue-stockings of the time. Then in 1925 he met Stella, the daughter of his friend E. D. Morel, who herself worked for some Labour publications.

Morel was one of the great crusaders of Edwardian England. Having started life in one of the big Liverpool-based shipping and trading companies operating in Africa, he was shocked by the conditions prevailing in the Congo, administered and exploited by a private company owned by Léopold II of Belgium. With the financial help of a Quaker friend, William Cadbury, he started a long-drawn-out campaign to get the British Government to take up this matter and force the Belgians to put a stop to the shameful conditions of wholesale slavery prevailing over this enormous territory.

This was one of the great edifying stories of moral fervour, of single-minded endeavour, and of complete dedication crowned by success. Morel joined the Labour Party and entered Parliament. He defended the pacifist cause with great energy during the War. His manifest honesty and sincerity enabled him to survive in the face of an hostile public opinion, which once the War was over, turned in his favour. When Labour came to power under MacDonald, he was a candidate for high office. Although passed over, he ranked high and wielded a not inconsiderable influence. He died suddenly in 1925, about a year before Retinger met his daughter.

On Retinger's part it was a *coup de foudre* with a delay. Stella had no indication of any strong interest on his part, although they corresponded when he was away. In the autumn of 1925 he left for Mexico and early in 1926 she went off to Switzerland to recuperate after some illness. Then suddenly, out of the blue, fresh from his adventures in American jails, he descended on St Moritz, where she was staying, and proposed. Within a few weeks they were married. A year later, in 1927, the first daughter, Marya, was born and three years later the second daughter, Stasia. In 1933 Stella died.

Although they were very much in love, the marriage did not turn out happily. Stella was a lively, articulate and highly intelligent young woman who shared his political interests and showed a good deal of understanding of his bohemian character. Some time earlier she had turned down a steady-going young social worker called Major Clement Attlee. Now, at the age of twenty-nine, she took the plunge and accepted this exotic bird, with the blessing of her elder brother, but against the wishes of her mother who only saw in him what she described as a 'penniless adventurer'. As it turned out, from her point of view, Mrs Morel was not far wrong.

They spent the first year together, going to France and for a few months to Mexico. Later, however, while his wife stayed behind, he spent more time abroad than at home. Stella understood and was forebearing as this little verse, clearly shows:

THE PRISONER

You, poor dove that may not coo

Eagle that may not soar,
Canary bird that may not sing
Falcon that must cut his wing
Where is your freedom now?

Hush, while I make my vow!
I who love you jealously
Just as you would want to be,
Love you too, unselfishly

I will always let you sing
Gamble, drink or anything
Therefore, canary, shake your wing!
I will always understand,
Sympathise,
And here's my hand
On it, and may you never cease to love me
Ever.

But the trouble was elsewhere. Retinger was extravagant. He did not have any money, nor seemed to care much about it. At first, somehow or other, they managed, but progressively things got more and more difficult. Stella's private means were quickly exhausted and she had to endure a long and bitter struggle to make ends meet and provide for her two daughters. Some recrimination naturally followed. However loving and understanding she might have been, she had to put up with a great deal.

Retinger was the most perfect illustration I knew of the parable of the birds who neither sow nor reap and for whom the Lord provides. Not wanting to be anybody's employee, he never sought nor accepted a job, much to the dismay of his dependants. At the same time whatever project he happened to have in mind took precedence over everything else. If it involved expenses, these had priority, and for the rest Providence would provide. Now and again people involved him in some commercial ventures and many times he was asked to intervene in Mexico. This helped to keep him going and paid the expenses of his frequent trips, but left him with little to live on. None of these businesses seems to have been successful enough to refloat his fortunes, while his strict adherence to a line of conduct which was above reproach and would not tarnish his reputation in Mexico prevented him from touching anything which could have been really lucrative. In the early thirties when most of his Mexican friends seemed to have been doing very well for themselves, the temptation must have been particularly strong. It would certainly have been easy for him to settle in Mexico as the local agent of some important foreign company. But this would have been in conflict with his political dreams which centred in Europe.

It is relatively easy for people with independent means, or at least a sound financial base, to be courageous, disinterested and independent, to fight for unpopular causes and pursue unlikely schemes. It is a different matter for those who have nothing to fall back on. This lack of concern with money was one of the remarkable things about him. Whatever the financial shortages of the moment, he was never depressed, never scared and never affected in his plans and policies. He well knew that this weakness could be turned into strength and his disinterestedness would prove an asset, provided he kept his nerve and never let himself be moved by the poor state of his finances. I, who at such times get ittery, admired him tremendously.

As the thirties dragged on, things got worse and worse. There were long spells of penury. Somehow or other he managed to carry on and lived by his pen. From London he wrote articles to the Polish press, among others to the *Robotnik* and *Wiadomosci Literackie*. Then in December 1937 he published an historical dictionary on Poles who had distinguished themselves abroad since the Middle Ages. It took a lot of research and scholarship and was well received in Poland. He also wrote *Conrad and his Contemporaries*, which was delightfully illustrated by his great friend Feliks Topolski, and prepared another book, of a more philosophical bent, on *Castes and Prejudices* which remained unfinished.

But fundamentally he was a disappointed man. Jolly and lively as he was, and good company for his friends, he saw his political fortunes sinking and his scope more and more restricted. Poland was firmly in the grip of an authoritarian régime, while the growth of nationalism in Europe precluded any possibility of doing anything constructive. Throughout the first half of the thirties there was little he could do. Later, clouds started gathering.

In May 1935, Pilsudski, who for the last nine years had been the *de facto* ruler of the country, died and power passed into the hands of some of his followers, men of incomparably smaller stature, who, moreover, were by no means united. The ineptitude of the Government grew while its popularity shrank. Demagogy increased whilst chauvinistic and bombastic propaganda tried to cover its shortcomings. As is usual in such cases, one of the victims was the foreign policy of the country. From 1935 it became shortsighted, improvident and mercurial. Of course in these years, Germany apart, this could be said of every other country in Europe.

In 1936 Hitler's troops re-occupied the Rhineland. In 1937 pressure on Austria mounted and in March 1938 Hitler drove into Vienna. In October there was Munich and the Sudetenlands were occupied.

In the face of the gathering storm, anxiety grew among the opposition parties, and contacts and consultations multiplied. There were also many soundings abroad. Finally, as tension mounted there were attempts to bury differences and rally together. There was even talk of a national coalition. In all this Retinger played a considerable part.

Then, in 1939, War broke out and Poland was overrun. A new chapter opened, so tragic, so poignant, so grandiose that the events and tribulations of the past faded and shrank like the skyline of a distant range.

PART THREE

Wartime Diplomacy

HITLER's invasion of Poland began on 1 September 1939. The German Panzer troops started pouring in from the north, the west and the south. German superiority in the air was overwhelming. Within a week or so it became obvious that the country would be overrun. The Polish Army retreated eastward, beyond the Vistula and the Bug, towards the less accessible parts of the country. On 17 September, Soviet troops occupied the eastern part of Poland – roughly as far as the present-day frontier – disarming and taking prisoner whatever Polish units they encountered. Nevertheless, a besieged Warsaw fought on until 27 September, while minor fighting went on in more remote parts of the country. The Government, parts of the Administration, many civilians and soldiers took refuge in Rumania. Some went to Hungary and a few to Lithuania. By the end of the month fighting was over and the whole country occupied.

The nation was stunned. Within a few weeks the proud and valiant Polish Army was smashed, the Administration collapsed, the Government fled. The optimism and the panache of the preceding years made the defeat particularly galling. The gallantry of the troops and the bravery of the people relieved the shame of the defeat, but the swiftness of the campaign was incomprehensible to those who still thought in terms of the previous war. The Poles were cast down, but they burned with revenge.

In retrospect it is hard to see what chance a virtually land-locked and isolated Poland could have had against the might of the German armies. In those days, however, irrational hopes prevailed. Until a few days before the German attack it was thought that Russia would help, or at least remain a friendly neutral. France and Britain would come to the rescue, attack from the west and defeat the German armies as they had done twenty years before. The belief in the decisive military superiority of the Western Allies reigned supreme while the whole of Poland felt in its bones that in a fight with Nazi Germany the very existence of the nation, let alone of the State, was at stake.

For one hundred and fifty years Poland had been absent from the map. In 1919, at long last hard fought independence was won and the State restored. It lasted twenty years. Now, at whatever price, it had to be rebuilt. In the morrow of defeat, before the dust began to settle, at the beginning of October, the question in everybody's mind was how to carry on the struggle and preserve the legality of the State. As twice in the past, a Polish army was being formed in France, based on the vast mass of émigré Poles. It was a ray of hope and a focus for all those who took refuge in Rumania and Hungary, and those who began to escape from the occupied country. During the winter people trickled through and by late spring an army, navy and air force nearly 80,000 strong was formed. As early as October, on his escape from Poland, General Sikorski, the senior officer present, assumed supreme command over the Polish forces in the West.

The other problem was the continuity of the State and of legal government. The Polish constitution had wisely provided that, in case of war, all constitutional powers should be vested in the President, who could also appoint his own successor. In that way the State and the Government could perpetuate itself virtually *ad infinitum*. Although in September 1939 President Moscicki and his Government escaped to Rumania, their authority – both moral and political – collapsed in the defeat. A change was necessary. It had to be carried out swiftly, with as much dignity as the tragic conditions would allow and without impairing the nation's war effort.

During October all this was done. Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz, a respected public figure, became President and Sikorski Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief. A new government was formed, from among the available leaders, which more or less represented the former opposition, but could also claim links with the old governing milieu. As far as wartime conditions allowed, it could pretend to be a national coalition and, in fact, was generally recognized as such. There was, of course, a good deal of manoeuvring and argument, but not more than could be considered tolerable in the circumstances.

Authoritarian and undemocratic as the old régime was, it had never gone so far as to render national unity impossible in wartime. Now, following the defeat, its more prominent leaders had to step down, while their opponents, whether representatives or sympathizers of opposition parties, or simply independent personalities with a clean record, came to the fore. A similar process, though on a much smaller scale, occurred amongst higher ranking officers and the Civil Service.

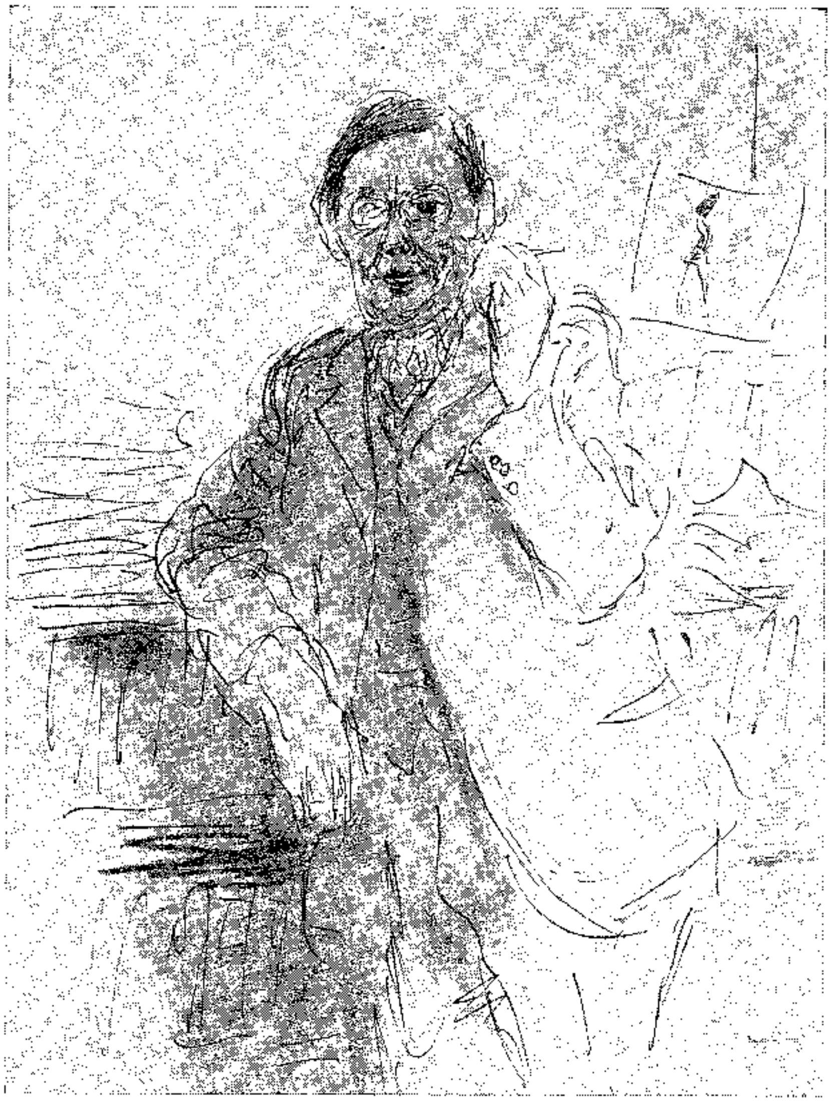
The Poles in exile were by no means politically homogeneous. There were four main pre-war opposition parties, a number of independent politicians and the followers of the late Marshall Pilsudski, themselves divided and sub-divided into several factions. In these circumstances the personal character and authority of the leaders was of prime importance. Throughout the war years Polish politics could only be understood in terms of personalities. Fortunately, from the start, Sikorski succeeded in imposing his authority and dominated the scene until his death in June 1943. His pre-eminence was recognized by the Allies; and this also had a stabilizing effect on the Polish community, which was not immune to bickerings and intrigues.

When Sikorski became Prime Minister he called Retinger and asked him to work for him. Apparently, at the end of their talk he patted him on the back and jokingly inquired how large were his debts. He laughed when he heard they could all be paid out of his first month's salary.

Retinger's status and functions were left vague. For lack of a better definition he was called adviser to the Council of Ministers, though he continued to live in London and not in Paris where the Government was. He mainly concerned himself with contacts, propaganda, external relations of all sorts.

Throughout the winter Polish forces in France were forming, their numbers fast increasing. The 'phoney war' dragged on. Then in April, the guns opened up again and Norway was invaded. A Polish brigade was dispatched and fought with distinction at Narvik. In May, the big offensive started on the Continent and German troops invaded Holland and Belgium. In Britain, Neville Chamberlain fell and Churchill took command. Immediately Retinger was called for consultations and this episode is briefly recorded in his notes:

> 'In May 1940 Churchill became Prime Minister. My Government was still in Paris and I received a cable asking me to come over, as the Polish Government was considering what attitude it should take.
>
> 'I had a meeting with General Sikorski and his immediate entourage, and suggested that Churchill, who in private life was the most honest and loyal man, a devoted husband and an excellent father, should be approached from the human side. General Sikorski and other Poles should try to become his personal friends. Churchill was a great patriot, a great believer in his country and an even greater believer in his own inspiring genius and was above any kind of party



2. Retinger in 1939, drawn by Feliks Topolski

bias. Although I did not think we could rely on him politically, we could rely on his personal loyalty. Alas! later my words proved only too true. General Sikorski, I must say, followed my advice completely, and with his charm succeeded in turning Churchill into a great personal friend.'

This incident is worth noting as this kind of advice was very characteristic of Retinger.

By now the War was moving fast. On 18 May, German troops broke the front at St Quentin and headed towards the coast in the direction of Abbeville which they reached on 22 May. A week later the evacuation of the British Army started at Dunkirk. French troops re-formed, establishing the front on the line of the Somme. On 5 June the German Panzers took the offensive again, crossed the river and by the 9th reached the Seine. Paris fell on the 14th. The day before, Churchill made his last trip to France in a desperate attempt to rally the tottering French Government, which by that time had taken refuge in Tours. It proved to be too late. The next day Reynaud fell and Pétain became Prime Minister. On the 16th the Germans reached Orléans on the Loire and on the 17th Pétain, by way of Madrid, asked Hitler for a truce. Although fighting continued it could no longer be called organized resistance. On the 23rd, the armistice was signed.

It is extraordinary to think how little the situation in France was understood at that time, even by the British Government who had all the information available and free access to anybody in the country. So great was the prestige of the French Army, so fresh the memory of the heroic spirit of the French people during the First World War, that the harsh truth was hard to believe. To the Poles, traditionally brought up in a spirit of admiration for France, on whom they had pinned all their hopes, it was unthinkable that this great and proud nation should collapse as easily as their own, incomparably weaker, country. In spite of the evidence around them they refused to admit that France would give in without a proper fight. Until the end nobody had given any thought what to do should the Battle of France be lost. As a result their disarray was complete.

The Polish units were dispersed. Part of the brigade evacuated from Norway with the rest of the Allied forces was landed in England, part in Brittany. The 1st Division was fighting on the central front, up on the Somme, while the 2nd was in Lorraine and Alsace. The 3rd, not fully formed, was being sent piecemeal to the nearest points at the front. The Government moved from Paris to Angers, then to Bordeaux. Liaison and communication was haphazard. Contradictory rumours, orders and counter orders criss-crossed one another with spark-like rapidity. The Polish President and some members of the Government and Administration embarked for England. Nobody knew what anybody else was doing or what decisions, if any, were taken.

Retinger watched helplessly from London. Defeat succeeded defeat and he could sense the coming catastrophe. Then he acted.

'Early in June 1940 I became extremely worried about the fate of General Sikorski and the Polish forces in France. I knew that the greater part of the Army, which at that time numbered about forty thousand, was engaged in fighting in Alsace and on the Somme, while a brigade which fought at Narvik was on its way back to France. In London we had scarcely any news from France and none from our Headquarters. I asked the Air Ministry, through the Polish Air Attaché, Colonel Kwiecinski, to provide me with a military plane to go to Bordeaux to locate General Sikorski and get some authentic news.

'In the evening of 17 June I had a telephone call from the Air Ministry telling me that they would fetch me at two o'clock the following morning. They took me to Blackbushe Airport, from where we set off at about 4 am. A plane was put at my disposal, and once in France the pilot had to take me wherever I had to go to see General Sikorski. Of course the plane was heavily armed, and I must confess to being a little afraid of the ammunition which was all too much in evidence!

'We landed first in Jersey to refuel, and I believe we were the last British military plane to land there until the liberation. From there we went to Bordeaux. Chaos reigned at the airport. Nobody knew anything! Nobody wanted to do anything, and at first I could get no transport from the airport to Bordeaux. But luckily I met Colonel Izycki, who afterwards became chief of the Polish Air Force in Britain, and we bribed a French driver to take me into the town. In the car with me was the pilot of the plane, Squadron Leader Biddel, who had got back at two o'clock the same morning from a bombing mission over Germany, and was so tired that he fell asleep immediately.

'In Bordeaux we drove to the British Embassy, and the sight

there was not a pleasant one. Hundreds of British people were waiting trying to find ways and means of returning to England. After a long tussle I succeeded in seeing an official, who was completely panic-stricken. When asked whether he had any information about the movements of General Sikorski his only reply was: "We don't know a damned thing; all we are thinking about is how to get away."

'I lost two or three hours in this way, and then it occurred to me that there must be a Polish Consul in Bordeaux. I got his address and went to see him. He was an old man who knew nothing at all, and he too was in a state of panic. When I asked about General Sikorski he said he was thinking of his own life, not about any Polish Prime Minister. We had a row, and as I raised my voice someone outside recognized it and came into the room. It was Alexander Mohl, who told me that General Sikorski was probably in Libourne, a small town not far from Bordeaux, where the Headquarters of the Polish Government and the Polish Air Force had been set up. He could not give me any details. He was the only man I met in Bordeaux who did not seem to be overcome by fear. Before then I had only known him very slightly, but from that moment there sprung a deep friendship between us.

'And so, off to Libourne with my French military driver, still bribing him heavily. The roads were blocked by refugees from all parts of France, and even from Belgium. They were in cars, horse-drawn carts, on bicycles and on foot. There was even a gipsy caravan among them. I also saw barrows being pushed along, some of which had come from Belgium, a distance of about five hundred miles. The cars, carts and barrows were piled up with an extraordinary variety of things which these poor people had tried to save from their homes. The thing which struck me most was a cage containing a canary on one of the barrows. The twenty odd miles we travelled were so congested with refugees that it was sometimes almost impossible to move.

'In Libourne nobody could direct me to the Polish Headquarters, but I met some acquaintances in the street who told me that General Sikorski was staying at the Sous-Préfecture. Without announcing myself I went up to his room. He was alone, and when he saw me he couldn't believe his eyes. He asked me whatever I was doing there, and as it was nearly lunch time, I said: "I have come from London to lunch with you." At that moment Professor Kot, who was at that time a mutual friend of ours, came into the room, and seeing me, and realizing that I flew from London, exclaimed: "You are the first ray of hope!" General Sikorski asked me what I had come for. I told him I had a plane and that I was going to take him to London that evening to arrange the evacuation of our forces to England. He replied without hesitation, that he would come with me on two conditions: that I could assure him he would be back within two days and that he would see the British Prime Minister the next day.

'Then we went to lunch at a small hotel, where about twenty-five of General Sikorski's nearest collaborators were present, and I am proud to say that I saw no trace of panic among them. They all wanted to carry on fighting the Germans, in spite of uncertainty as to how this could be done, and when General Sikorski told them about our flight they were all delighted.

'At 4 pm we left for the airport in the same car, with poor Biddel still fast asleep. The panic in Bordeaux was now at its height. It took us over an hour to cross the short bridge over the Garonne. Biddel, who by that time was awake, was worried because he had orders to fly only by day, but fortunately we arrived at the airport at six o'clock, and within a few minutes were off. A few of General Sikorski's entourage came with us. Instead of flying over the sea, as we had done on the way out, the pilot decided to fly right across, since that was the only way to reach England in daylight. We flew rather low, and saw the most distressing sight: columns of German soldiers marching through the streets of Rennes, and some districts being shelled. From time to time there was a little fighting. We flew over Jersey, which by then was occupied, and landed in darkness. It took us another two hours to reach London by car. We arrived at the Dorchester Hotel that night and were greeted by Sir Charles Peake and Victor Cazalet.

'At once we got in touch with the Prime Minister's office, and a meeting was arranged for the following day for General Sikorski. A memorable conversation was held between the two men. They met on 19 June 1940, and their talk lasted five hours. I was not present at the conversation (Sikorski was on that occasion accompanied by Count Raczynski, the Polish Ambassador in London), but the General gave me an almost verbatim account as soon as he returned from the meeting, and I believe that the following words he quoted were absolutely true. Churchill, mindful of the scarcity of trained troops in Great Britain, was of course pleased that nearly 35,000 Polish soldiers and airmen could be brought over from France. He called in Admiral Nasmith-Dunbar and some other naval experts, and in Sikorski's presence a lengthy discussion began as to how the Poles could be brought to Britain, their number, and other military details which I now do not recall.

'During the final discussion of the evacuation which, as will be remembered, was carried out in good order, Churchill told General Sikorski quite frankly that he had two million men in uniform but only 750,000 rifles and very few guns. He wondered why the Poles were coming to England. General Sikorski replied that first and foremost we had to fight the Germans, the enemy who, without provocation, had invaded Poland, and that we could no longer fight in France because the French had betrayed his and his countrymen's hopes. He then said – "As the leader of the Poles I must ask you, the head of the British Government, whether or not you are going to betray us?"

'General Sikorski put this question very earnestly, and Churchill with tears in his eyes (afterwards I was to see him weep on three occasions) replied: "I trust you and yours can count on me for ever. England will keep faith with the Poles." At that moment neither he nor General Sikorski could foresee Yalta, nor the withdrawal of recognition of the legal Polish Government.

'As long as General Sikorski lived Churchill was entirely on his side, supporting the Polish leader in every way and behaving towards him as he would have done, I suppose, towards a younger brother. Churchill visited the Polish troops, saw General Sikorski very often and was always cordial. I had many opportunities of being present at dinners or luncheons at which Churchill was the guest of members of the Polish Government, or was the host to the Polish leaders.

'General Sikorski left London on 19 June, as he had stipulated, and in conjunction with the British naval and military authorities, the evacuation of the Polish forces started the same day. We saved a good many of our soldiers in France, and as a result over 30,000 troops were soon re-assembled in England. What with young people coming clandestinely from Poland, and Poles from the Americas, this number was soon swelled to about 80,000, and when a couple of years later General Anders with his Polish forces from Russia joined them, they totalled something like 210,000. Thus in the months before

America entered the war the Polish was the third largest army in Britain, coming next to the Canadian. Most them were quartered in Scotland. A Polish Air Force under the supreme British command was formed autonomously.

'After General Sikorski left England he spent only about thirty-six hours in Bordeaux, before returning to London.

'Before leaving London Sikorski wrote the following letter to President Raczkiewicz who earlier embarked from Bordeaux for England:

19 June 1940

' "The British Government sent a bomber for me, which was to pick me up from Bordeaux or even from Nancy as they were aware of our difficulties at the front. I took this opportunity to come to London for twenty-four hours and settle the question of the evacuation, which had reached deadlock. During Wednesday, I had talks with Churchill, Halifax, Eden, Sinclair and others and they agreed to alter the present British attitude.

' "The enclosed memorandum handed to Churchill served as a basis for the decisions taken. Some of it was changed, however, in so far as we were overtaken by events. I enclose also copies of dispatches. You will gather from them what the position is.

' "I held up your appeal to the King. It arrived today, too late, as everything was settled – and that on the basis of our alliance with Britain and in the spirit of true comradeship.

' "If I succeed in getting out of France those units which are fighting their way to the coast we shall again form a Polish Army, which, in this dark hour of the war, had proved to be an unfailing source of strength. As a result of its record at the front the British took a most loyal attitude to the Polish cause.

' "At the first opportunity please convey to the King our thanks for the attitude of his Government to Poland and the Poles.

' "I leave a note for Foreign Minister Zaleski concerning the Soviet problem, which our Ambassador will hand to Halifax and which results from our conversation with him today on this subject. I cannot understand why he has not yet been given the memorandum, prepared some ten days ago, on our attitude to Russia.

' "Tomorrow morning I fly back to Bordeaux to see to the latest instructions. I owe this opportunity to the British Government, who

understood my motives, notwithstanding their fears over my safe return to Bordeaux. I hope to be in London in two or three days.

' "The question of the ex-territorial rights of the Government and of its seat, which should not be far from London, should be settled by Minister Zaleski."

'This letter was probably not delivered, because before the President landed, General Sikorski came back for a second time and to the great surprise of the newcomers was there to greet the President.'

2

However good Retinger's relations with Sikorski were before the War, after the rescue episode they became closer still. From that moment he became his closest confidant and adviser and a constant companion.

Sikorski had many of the qualities needed for his difficult job. Thoroughly Polish in outlook and character, he also bore the hallmark of the soldier-statesmen – a compound of chivalry, style and a deep sense of duty, which helped establish his reputation and won him the friendship and respect of many of the Allied leaders, and, in particular, of Churchill. He was also a firm leader, an essential quality for a Prime Minister in exile. The Poles were facing agonizing dilemmas and their nerves were strained. A firm hand was badly needed. Sikorski, as his correspondence shows, also knew how to reprove. Clad in his Roman-like gravity, he cast his thunders from Olympian heights. At the same time, since he was quick to forgive and forget, in the end everything was well.

Retinger's relationship with him was based above all on a mutual respect and a warm friendship. But it took a gayer and more familiar form. Within Sikorski's immediate circle, Retinger was the joker in the pack. They spoke of him with affection and with a smile. He was the Fra Diavolo, the familiar, the 'grey eminence'. He was stimulating and witty, sparkling with unconventional opinions and original remarks. He was always alert and good company. He sailed among the countless petty intrigues concocted daily around the summit of power, keeping a level keel, pouring oil on troubled waters and appeasing ruffled feelings. And these were many. Like many Poles, Sikorski was quick-tempered and so too was Retinger, although if my experience of him in later years is any guide, he would never lose his temper unless he was very sure of his ground. The two men had many rows and many times sparks flew between them. Knowing how safe their friendship was, they could well afford to differ. Perhaps it was the only way of keeping up the balance between two strong characters, when only one was in a position of power.

The rescue of Sikorski was a daring act on the part of Retinger. It was also an event of great importance to the Polish cause. Retinger snatched Sikorski, his Government and a good part of the army out of a situation of great embarrassment if not catastrophe.

Later in London, Sikorski wanted to decorate Retinger with the Cross of Virtuti Militari, the highest Polish military award. Retinger refused. Sikorski insisted and tried again. Retinger was adamant. He had never accepted any decoration and never would. It was another eccentricity which he cherished – perhaps a case of inverted snobbery. Finally, a year or so later, Sikorski thought he could catch him by stealth. Many high-ranking officers were to be decorated and a suitable ceremony was organized for the occasion. Retinger joined Sikorski in his car for the drive to the headquarters where people were assembled, and only then was he told that he too would receive a decoration. Immediately a big row flared up and Retinger jumped out at the next traffic lights. Sikorski was so furious that the ceremony was postponed.

3

The Polish Government gathered together in London late in June 1940 and began to settle into its new surroundings. Its primary task was the struggle against Germany. The army detachments which had escaped from France needed to re-form, re-equip and replenish. The air force, quickly recreated, was soon to distinguish itself in the Battle of Britain, while the navy, with its dozen or so ships, presented relatively few problems. In addition there were the countless Poles stranded or making their way through war-torn Europe, the Middle East and Africa who had to be helped and if possible brought over.

And there was Poland itself. The scanty news from home was fearful. Stalin began with arrests and deportations and by the time Germany attacked Russia in 1941, about a million and a half Poles had been sucked into the vast expanses of the Soviet Union. Germany, on the other hand, incorporated a large slice of the country and began expelling Poles into central Poland which was endowed with a particularly tough administrative régime. In Cracow, early in 1940, one hundred and sixty-three University professors were arrested and sent to concentration camps for no other reason than their intellectual prominence

and value to Polish culture. Throughout the country there were shootings, arrests and deportations to Germany.

Those who were in Britain could get little news. Now and again some messages were smuggled. This letter, dated March 1940, reached the Government and is still in Retinger's files. A young maid was writing to her mistress in Warsaw who had asked her to come back to her former job.

> 'My lady I am very sorry I must refuse but it's not my fault and I would surely come, even I would not think twice about it, and I am very sorry my lady you have no idea what we must go through we girls. I received a summons on Tuesday from the Arbeitzamt for medical inspection and so I went and we were perhaps 500 girls and we had to undress completely naked as God made us and they first started checking if we had no chest ailment and then down below they put a tube and then a long needle and then some scissors long and narrow and then they heated them over a fire and they were so hot and they touched me or perhaps cut me because I was shrieking so much and then blood run and I passed out, and so they did to all 18 to 30 year old – I don't know what it is but its surely murder because I was ill for three days and on Friday I got a note saying I must get ready to leave on Tuesday the 26 at 8 in the morning a whole transport of us is going to Germany but we don't know where but when I shall get there I shall write where I am and with whom I am staying. All those with illnesses will not go. And so there is nothing new here everything is alright and about that big priest you know my lady he was killed during the first day of the war and there are now no ladies left in Grudziadz and Mr Korzeniowski died and his son was arrested and shot and Mrs Korzeniowska died five weeks ago and the store in their house is closed and there is a hospital and that is all I know. I am sending you very sincere greeting and kiss your hands and same to the old lady.'

The mind boggled and the spine shivered at some of the messages which filtered through. The anxiety about families, relations and friends was often unbearable. All through the War Poles abroad had to fight and work under its strain. But there was also some more heartening news. Morale in the country, naturally severely shaken and depressed by the fall of France, was soon to pick up. A resistance movement was being organized and a system of liaison and communication had to be devised.

The Polish war effort in the West was closely integrated with that of Great Britain. The army, the air force and the navy were under the overall command of the British units to which they were assigned and their internal organization was the same as that of the respective British Services.

The Polish forces were there first of all to fight the common enemy. As far as the Polish Government was concerned they were also destined to be the nucleus of future Polish forces in the liberated country. As such, and because the possibility of replenishment was severely restricted, they were particularly precious from the point of view of the future of the country. And yet Poles never hesitated to take part in any Allied action, however risky. Nearly a year later when an expeditionary force was being set up to sail to the relief of Greece, threatened with German invasion, Churchill asked for the Polish brigade which was stationed in the Middle East. The dispatch of such a force was politically necessary, although it would run an inordinate risk, as was later confirmed by events. For the sake of the common cause, Sikorski unhesitatingly agreed. 'I saw Sikorski,' Churchill wrote to Eden in Cairo on 14 March 1941, 'and asked for the Polish Brigade. He agreed in the most manly fashion, but he asked that the brigade, which was one of the few remaining embodiments of Polish nationality, should not be lightly cast away or left to its fate. I promised full equipment and no greater risks than would be run by our own flesh and blood. He said "you have millions of soldiers, we have only these few units". I hope you appreciate what we are asking these valiant strangers, and that General Wavell will have this in his mind always.'

Throughout the War the struggle against Germany was wholly military, in the sense that it raised no political problems among the Poles. Hitler never made any peace offers and never seriously thought of asking the Poles to join his 'New Order' in Europe. And the Poles never questioned the necessity of the struggle. Nobody wavered. The whole nation was united and the only problem facing the leadership was to direct this resolve into the most effective channels. The Government's headaches were elsewhere, for even if Germany were defeated, Russia would have to be contended with. In 1940 she was still the ally of Germany. In those days it was impossible to foresee what the future might hold but the clouds were there on the horizon.

This explains some of the anxious concern of the Sikorski Government with the aftermath of war, and the importance of the political and moral support it tried to acquire among the Western Allies. But there were other reasons as well. The foreign policy of pre-war Poland had been a complete failure. Its only excuse could be that other countries were equally guilty of the same sins, follies and improvidence, and the new Government was determined not to repeat past mistakes. At the same time the harm done to the reputation of the country among Western public opinion had to be repaired. All this was an urgent task.

The new thinking could draw on old traditions. Under the Jagiellon Kings, as from the end of the fourteenth century, Poland had united peacefully, under one Crown, nations of very different backgrounds. The union with Lithuania, at that time a vast empire stretching from the shores of the Baltic deep down into the Ukraine was the only example in modern history of a complete merger of two states without one single battle having been fought. At various times, neighbouring kingdoms and principalities were peacefully united with the Polish Crown. Sometimes they remained together, sometimes they fell apart, but, altogether over a span of four centuries, there was practically no war of conquest. It generated a sound tradition and later whenever it was broken adverse consequences followed.

And so while the failure of the League of Nations cooled enthusiasm towards world-wide organizations, the thoughts of the Poles turned towards the more modest idea of regional groupings. In the conditions of war against Germany and Italy it was too early to think in terms of the whole of Europe.

As early as the close of 1939 in Paris, the Polish Government initiated talks with Beneš and Masaryk, who were forming a Czechoslovak National Committee, soon to be recognized by France and Britain as a provisional government. This was, however, a delicate matter. Although neighbours, sharing the same Slavonic origin, and using languages which are sufficiently close for one to understand the other with difficulty, the Poles and the Czechs had developed a dissimilar political tradition. As nations, their sentimental make-up and psychology differ considerably. Throughout the last four centuries, their relations had been neutral and indifferent. In 1938, however, when Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia, Poland behaved tactlessly. Poland had a small territorial claim to a part of the industrial town of Teschen and the surrounding countryside, which was cut in two by the frontier line.

When Hitler annexed Czechoslovakia the Poles grabbed it. However good their claim may have been, it was an inelegant action and a sore point with the Czechs.

Nevertheless, now that both countries shared the same fate, discussions soon started about the future. The Poles suggested exploring the possibility of some kind of union between the two countries. On several occasions, during the Middle Ages, and as late as the fifteenth century, the two countries had been united under one Crown. Perhaps the past could be revived under a guise more appropriate to modern times. Now, when the two governments met again in London, talks were resumed. Some far-fetched proposals were put forward; there was talk of a political federation and custom union. For the time being an inter-governmental co-ordinating committee was set up in January 1941.

This noble attempt proved in the end abortive. The Poles were clumsy, hesitant and showed less generosity than their position of senior partner required. The Czechoslovaks were cautious and suspicious. Perhaps neither felt the necessary sympathy towards the other. It was a marriage of convenience in which mutual sex-appeal was lacking. But above all Beneš wanted to preserve friendly relations with Moscow. When in the summer of 1942 the Poles began to get into difficulties with the Russians, Beneš began to cool. He pressed the Russians to make their attitude clear and in January 1943 was told they were unequivocally against any union with Poland. Three months later when Stalin broke diplomatic relations with Sikorski's Government, Beneš dropped the Poles like a hot potato.

In the meantime, in the summer of 1940 following the fall of France, a number of European governments were exiled in London. A year later they were to be joined by the Yugoslavs and the Greeks. All shared the same concern for the future and drew similar lessons from past experiences. Ideas of regional groupings found a good deal of support and soon the Belgian, Dutch and Luxembourg governments on the one hand, and the Greeks and the Yugoslavs on the other, started consultations. In January 1942, the latter signed an agreement on the creation of a Balkan union, which was to be open to other countries in the area, and a week later the Polish and Czechoslovak governments published a similar agreement which envisaged a custom union and called for close co-operation in foreign, defence and social policies. Further steps were taken and the Poles began to talk about larger groupings stretching from Scandinavia to the Aegean Sea. In February, Sikorski visited Beneš to suggest a joint initiative to get together eight countries (Norway, the Benelux, Greece, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland) to explore the possibilities of closer political, economic and military co-operation, after the War.

During the early forties, in all these moves, the chief pre-occupation was of course the muzzling of Germany. Nowhere was there any open trace of creating a bulwark against Russia, although concern about Stalin's intentions was at the back of many people's minds. In those days Russia was not the great power she was to become later. Against Finland during the winter of 1939–40 she showed up extremely poorly, and during the whole of 1941 it looked as if Hitler would prevail. In any case Moscow was consulted and expressed approval. The Sikorski-Stalin declaration of 4 December 1941 stated:

> 'After a victorious war and the appropriate punishment of the Hitlerite criminals, it will be the aim of the Allied States to ensure a durable and just peace. This can be achieved only through a new organization of international relations on the basis of unification of the democratic countries in a durable alliance. Respect for international law backed by the collective armed force of the Allied States must form the decisive factor in the creation of such an organization. Only under this condition can a Europe destroyed by German barbarism be restored and a guarantee be created that the disaster created by the Hitlerites will never be repeated.'

The United States also approved. On his first visit to the United States, in March 1941, Sikorski told Roosevelt of his efforts to promote the emergence of federal unions in Eastern Europe and met with a very favourable response and assurances of support. Many European exiles in the States worked in favour of the same cause. In the course of the year they set up a Central and Eastern European Planning Board in New York to study and propagate these ideas. As a result Americans were both well-informed and much in favour.

When in March 1942, Sikorski again visited Washington the situation was much the same. As we now know from published documents, however, the American Government had begun to pay increasing attention to Russia's post-war role and interests in the area. The Poles did not seem to be immediately aware of this, taking American pronouncements at their face value. Thus during his third and last visit to the States, Sikorski wrote on the 7 December 1942 in a letter to Secretary of State Sumner Welles:

> 'I was struck the other day by the boldness of your conceptions on the problem of Federation. The Polish Government has constantly championed the idea of Federation, while I personally have become the object of hatred on the part of the Germans, precisely for having unceasingly proclaimed that idea ever since November 1939.
>
> 'I would like to recall to your memory that I never believed in any marginal solution of the problems of a durable peace. Neither the security, nor the well-being of any country in the world can be solved unless it is considered as a whole. I do not venture to appropriate the right of dealing with world affairs. I am only concerned with my own country. I advocated co-operation between lesser states of Europe as well as the establishment among them of federated blocks, which would entail a voluntary limitation of State sovereignty.'

In all this Retinger played a pioneering role. He wrote:

> 'In my frequent conversations with General Sikorski before the War I pointed out the advantages for Poland of a federated Europe, and the impossibility for a small country like Poland to live surrounded by jealous neighbours, since she would be unable to withstand any pressure that might be brought to bear on her by the two big Powers nearest her, Russia and Germany. General Sikorski accepted this idea completely, and in time became a convinced federalist. That is why, when he became Prime Minister during the War, he always made a point of emphasizing the necessity for small nations of forming regional federations which might combine into a larger European federation.
>
> 'The first time General Sikorski spoke officially in this sense was in a speech delivered in London in November 1939. Then the Polish Government started conversations with President Beneš on the subject, the outcome of which was an Agreement between Poland and Czechoslovakia. It was to be the nucleus of a Central European Federation, in which we thought that the Baltic States and Hungary, and possibly Austria and Rumania should be included.
>
> 'Among the Czechs, the only one who fell in completely with those plans was Jan Masaryk, who in his weak way manoeuvred as much as he could towards an agreement between the Polish and the Czechoslovak Governments. Hubert Ripka was also on the same side, but on the whole, chiefly under the influence of Beneš, the Czechs adopted an attitude of expediency. At the same time the idea of some kind of cohesion among the successor States of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was certainly there, as was proved by the Little Entente. But first of all, the Czechs wanted to be closely in touch with the Western Powers, especially with France and the United States, so as to ensure for themselves a privileged position among the Eastern European countries. On the other hand, Czechoslovakia was one of the two smaller nations in Eastern Europe which, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, had strong links with Russia.
>
> 'In the early years of the war although the Poles helped the Czech Government in every possible way to gain recognition, there was still the question of Teschen which loomed large in the feelings between the Polish and Czechoslovak leaders. How many times in my nightly conversations with Masaryk did we both agree that the question of Teschen, where the total population was less than eighty thousand, must not cause a lasting break between the Poles and the Czechs. I must admit that I personally recognized that most of the mistakes were made by the Poles and took the view which was shared by both Sikorski and Beneš that the Teschen question should be settled only within some form of federation between the Poles and the Czechs. But the mutual suspicion gave rise to never-ending conflict between the leaders of the two countries.
>
> 'Another source of friction was the fact that the Czechs took advantage of their personal contacts with the Western political leaders, which were infinitely closer than those of the Poles, and used their influence in a way which the Polish leaders disliked. On the other hand, the Poles made a mistake in being too close with those Slovaks who were dissatisfied (I believe justly) with the predominance of the Czechs.
>
> 'Finally, notwithstanding the fact that we really did help Beneš, there was no personal sympathy between him and General Sikorski, and scarcely any talks between the two which did not end in bad feelings on both sides. Masaryk could have done a lot, but he didn't, and when I tackled him about these problems he made excuses, but put forward no arguments. Of course, his position was not as stable within the entourage of Beneš as it seemed to outsiders. I should not

like to criticize Masaryk too strongly, because of his bravery in returning to Czechoslovakia and his heroic death. Masaryk had splendid qualities as a man. Physically he was not unlike Paul-Henri Spaak and Trygve Lie, a solid, well-built man, what is known as a peasant type, but a peasant who had achieved the highest culture. He was one of the best linguists I have ever met. He spoke not only perfect English, but also Cockney, and when he wanted to he could talk with the Middle West accent. His French was flawless, as was his Russian; he spoke Polish well, and, when he liked, Polish slang. He was a widely read man, and to crown all, he was a sportsman and an athlete of no small merit. By nature he was lazy, like Spaak, but when circumstances forced him to make enormous efforts, he made them, again like Spaak. I saw him later in the Hradcany in Prague, when he was Minister for Foreign Affairs, and he was driving not only his civil servants, but himself, very hard. He worked half the night and slept in his office, although he suffered terribly from insomnia. Again like Spaak, he was direct in intimate conversation, saying exactly what he thought, but unfortunately he did not see his way clear to enforce his own policies until the supreme moment when he had to choose, and when that came he chose the right way.

'On the Polish side there were also great difficulties. General Sikorski liked the Czechs, but disliked Beneš. However he succeeded in his own way in ridding his policy of his prejudices, although I am sorry to say that this was not the case with some of his most prominent collaborators on Czechoslovak affairs.

'Parallel with our negotiations with the Central and Eastern Europeans were our conversations relating to the unity of Europe with Western politicians.

'There I found the most favourable responses from Marcel-Henri Jaspar, the first member of the Belgian Government to reach London during the War. He was one of the first to realize that his country's interests were linked with those of the Western Allies and that they could only be served from London. Soon after his arrival we became very friendly.

'The word patrician was often used in the literature of the first part of the twentieth century by Galsworthy, Thomas Mann and many others, and it was only after knowing Jaspar that I realized its true meaning. A great bourgeois with a liberal mind, trying to find a compromise when possible, but always letting principles prevail over appeasement; cynical as to details, with fortitude in big affairs, Jaspar could discuss impartially, neutrality and anti-militarism in the thick of the War, but when it came to the point he himself enlisted in the Pioneer Corps and, a middle-aged man used to luxury, spent night after night training as a private near London. Always trying to settle arguments and quarrels among his political colleagues, his judgement was invariably right. Discreet with strangers, he did not hesitate to be outspoken in councils. Brought up in the liberal tradition, he knew how to adapt his policy to the exigencies of a situation. Although he could have been feared because he knew too much, he was only respected, even by his political adversaries. But what I liked most about him was his extensive culture. He was one of those exceptional politicians who not only read everything worth reading, but wrote several books and essays which, I believe, have lasting value.

'With Jaspar I could talk freely, and he accepted my ideas on the unity of Europe and helped me by spreading them in his own circles.

'He had a charming wife, and a mother-in-law who was an extraordinary character. She ran away from Russia at the beginning of the Revolution and brought over as many precious stones as she could. Ever after she carried them with her in her handbag, and they saved her and her daughters many times. She used to open her handbag to people she befriended and show them the stones, among which there was a diamond said to be forty carats. Only *in extremis* would she sell the smaller stones, and when Jaspar lived in London, rather than part with any of them she cooked for the household. And a marvellous cook she was. There was always a very pleasant atmosphere at the receptions given by the Jaspar family.

'Another Belgian, of course, was Paul-Henri Spaak. He was one of the youngest Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of the century. During the War he played a very important role, not only in his country's affairs but also among the Allies. A long time elapsed before he came over, and we in London did not much like the fact that he prolonged unnecessarily his stay in Vichy for several weeks. But he came to England eventually, and with immense tact he slowly built round himself a consistent reputation as a shrewd and wise politician. In the company of friends he is the gayest and most entertaining man, the only natural-born clown I have met in my life, except, of course, Grock. But Spaak is seldom a clown in public life.

'Belgium was fortunate in having at that time two of the ablest politicians in the world; Paul-Henri Spaak, and Paul van Zeeland. Van Zeeland also became Prime Minister at an early age; I believe he was only thirty-two. Unlike Spaak who, with his round jovial face represents the typical bourgeois, van Zeeland, tall, very handsome, has the appearance of a dynast, which I suspect he is. The best of husbands and fathers, he bestows on his family a tenderness quite unusual in these days. I have seldom seen a family so united.

'What a contrast between van Zeeland and Spaak, the former with a mind of a mathematician, the latter with a mind of an artist. Van Zeeland always had a long-term policy, while Spaak generally acts on the spur of an inspiration which, like the weather forecasts by meteorologists, fails only in fifty per cent of cases. Spaak is accommodating, van Zeeland rigid in his principles. Spaak is an atheist, but in such a way that he does not bother about being anti-religious, while van Zeeland is entirely devoted to his Catholic principles and tries to put them into effect. Van Zeeland always believed in the necessity of getting smaller nations into bigger unions, perhaps because he was inspired by the past grandeur and universalism of the Catholic Church. Spaak, having proposed the neutrality of Belgium before the War, learned by experience that solidarity among nations was the only means of ensuring peace and economic welfare, and that is why, soon after I met him, he became an ardent supporter of the idea of the unity of Europe.

'The fourth outstanding Belgium – how lucky was Belgium – was Roger Motz, formerly President of the Liberal Party and later Chairman of the Liberal International.

'Because of their intellectual qualities I always enjoyed the conversation of these four men, but as a companion I preferred Motz. In a small circle he was perhaps very cynical, but at crucial times I have never known him to budge from his principles. During the War these four were headed by M. Hubert Pierlot, who had become Prime Minister, if I may say so, by accident.

'The Poles, lead by General Sikorski, started talks with the Belgians about the unity of Europe on 7 February 1941. I have always remembered the date because years afterwards both Jaspar and Spaak told me that they had put it down in their diaries as one of the most important and interesting conversations they had at that time. So far as I remember, there were present Pierlot, Jaspar and Spaak,

General Sikorski and myself. Spaak and Jaspar were from the outset entirely in favour of the idea of the unity of Europe. For Pierlot the thing was so completely new that he did not grasp its importance, and it took him several months to agree to our ideas, but once they had all agreed they went ahead steadily. Van Zeeland, who was in America at the time was also in favour. As is well-known, van Zeeland and Spaak took part from the beginning in the post-war movement for the unity of Europe.

'A few months later we started talks with the Dutch, who were less brilliantly represented in London than the Belgians, but who had the great advantage of having either in London or in Canada Queen Wilhelmina, whose authority and experience were so great that what the Government lacked in brilliance she made up by her prestige. The Prime Minister was Professor Gerbrandy who, as is the rule in the Dutch Government, did not control foreign affairs, which were at that time in the hands of Mr van Kleffens. But it was Pieter Kerstens, who was then Minister for Economic Affairs, who became my great friend. He was a Catholic and a Conservative, who took at once to the idea of European unity, and until he retired rendered enormous services to it. As for Gerbrandy he kept aloof while van Kleffens needed more time for reflection. I remember one of the Belgians saying jokingly to van Kleffens: "We lost the War trying to make up our minds; be careful not to make the same mistake." I think I may say that the first suggestion of Benelux grew out of our conversations on federated blocs.

'Later, when the Greek Government led by Mr Panayotis Pipinelis came to London we received further support. The Greeks took more or less the same attitude, although they were less explicit than the Czechs, the Belgians and the Dutch.

'With the Norwegians things were more difficult. They were very traditionalist and used to Scandinavian neutrality, which was, of course, broken by the clumsy German policy. They did not feel close to other European nations, and when they were away from Scandinavia they were out of their depth. It was difficult to find out what the Prime Minister, Mr Nygaardsvold, had in mind, since he spoke no language but Norwegian. Moreover, he would certainly not have been at all interested in foreign affairs had it not been for the War. Although Trygve Lie was a lawyer and a politician, he adopted the Civil Servant's attitude of caution when faced with anything new, and in any case, he thought (even in 1941) that European unity could not be achieved without the active co-operation of the United States, and was the first, so far as I remember, to speak to me about the North Atlantic community. In fact, although the Norwegians took part in our joint deliberations on the establishment of European unity after the War, they were not only more cautious than anybody else, but always looked to the Americans. The unhappy Free French did not know what kind of policy they would have after the War, but paid lip-service to any joint undertaking.

'In order to achieve greater cohesion during the War, and after discussing the matter with Pipinelis, Spaak, van Zeeland and Kerstens, and with the full support of General Sikorski, I suggested regular meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the Continental countries in London, and until the death of General Sikorski we held about a score of such meetings, at which the underlying idea was to prepare for the unity of Europe. The meetings took place in the Polish Prime Minister's office, and were usually attended by two representatives of each Government.* Through Mr Prins, the Swedish Ambassador, I was in touch with the Swedes who, of course, especially at that time, did not want to participate in anything that might look as though they were leaning too much on one side of the fence, while the Danes simply could not be found.

'The first of these meetings was held in October 1942, and they continued until 1944. The Polish Government provided the Secretariat and their agenda included matters such as the preparation of the conditions of armistice, punishment of war crimes, reparations, the disarmament of Germany and the reconstruction of Europe. Apart from this highly necessary work, they were also meant to develop the habit among European Governments of working together.

'These meetings of the Continental Foreign Ministers ended a few months after General Sikorski's crash in Gibraltar. After his death I left the Cabinet of the Prime Minister and shortly after went to Poland. There was nobody else who would take the trouble of calling meetings and also the men who were the prime movers of this action were no longer available. Moreover, by then people were more interested in war developments – the Normandy landings, and so on.

'To supplement the meetings of the Foreign Ministers we also arranged periodical luncheons of the Prime Ministers of the Continental countries, presided over by each Prime Minister in rotation. To these luncheons we also invited distinguished statesmen of other countries, such as Anthony Eden and Anthony Drexel Biddle, Jr, who started by being Ambassador to Poland and who eventually became Ambassador to practically every Central and Eastern European country. On one occasion we invited Mr Maisky, the Russian Ambassador, but he very politely declined our invitation.

'The Foreign Ministers' meetings, although not publicized, created great interest in Great Britain and America. One of the Americans particularly interested was Mr John Foster Dulles, who was then only the representative of the United Churches of America, and who had come to study European problems. I remember spending several hours with him and discussing not only Polish affairs, but also the general idea of the unity of Europe.

'Among the members of the British Government, apart from Sir Stafford Cripps, Ernest Bevin, then Minister of Labour, was also keenly interested in our views and reacted very favourably to ideas of European unity including Britain. In 1941, at the invitation of General Sikorski, he came to see us and the three of us had a very lengthy conversation on this question. Mr Bevin was quite definite about the necessity of changing Great Britain's aloofness and need to participate actively in Continental affairs. I still remember the phrase he used: "The isolation of England started with Queen Elizabeth. It was detrimental to England and detrimental to the Continent. We must now bury even the souvenir of this Elizabethan policy and start actively trying to participate as closely as possible in European affairs, even if we do not try to obtain the leadership of Europe."

'This sentiment was, of course, fully shared by General Sikorski and, I would say, by most of the continentals who were in London. In fact, whenever we spoke about the problems of European unity with any English politician, everyone, perhaps with the exception of the Foreign Office people, seemed to agree that in future Britain must play her part in Continental affairs, and abandon her old policy of the balance of power. This attitude largely stemmed from Churchill's offer to the French of a common citizenship.

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*'Count Raczynski and I spoke for Poland; Jan Masaryk and Hubert Ripka for Czechoslovakia; Mr Aghnides, and generally Pipinélis, for Greece; Trygve Lie, and usually Mr Raestad, for Norway; for the Yugoslavs Nimtitch and Gavrilovic; Bech for Luxembourg; Spaak and General Langenhove for Belgium; for the Netherlands van Kleffens and Kerstens.' Retinger was also in close touch with Ambassador Huseyin Rauf Orbey, a near colleague of Kemal Pasha.

'As I have already said, our missionary efforts triggered off conversations between the Belgians and the Dutch which led to the creation of Benelux. As a matter of fact, it was round our council table late in 1941, with General Sikorski and myself participating, that the first talks on co-operation between Holland and Belgium took place between Mr Spaak and Mr van Kleffens.

'I should like to add here, although it may seem indiscreet, that when feelings were running high against King Leopold, some of the most eminent Belgians thought about a very close union, not only with the Dutch people but also with the Dutch Crown.

'Later, Beneš and Masaryk, as a result of the ill-fated agreement they made in Moscow in December 1943, denounced to our great sorrow and, I think, to the regret of Masaryk, the Polish-Czech agreement and ceased to participate in our European activities.

'The fact, however, that we held those meetings helped me personally after the War to start again on a new footing the idea of the unity of Europe, which finally took the form of the European movement.'

4

Relations with the Soviet Union loomed large among the worries of the Polish Government in London. The Tsarist occupation, which many remembered, the 1920 war and the Soviet intervention in 1939 had combined to create an attitude of mistrust and often hostility. All this and the Russian war with Finland conveyed a wrong impression of Russian strength which further contributed to warp their political thinking.

From very early on Sikorski thought differently. When back in 1923, Retinger with Edo Fimmen saw him in Warsaw, he showed himself to be strongly opposed to any anti-Russian policy. As this note of Retinger's shows, he also went further:

> 'From the time of our conversation with him in 1923 Sikorski unfailingly gave his encouragement to anything which could help to bring about a better understanding between Russians and Poles, and lead to their collaboration. Thus, when a year later he learned that I had arranged a conversation with M. Rakovsky, at that time Russian Chargé d'Affaires in London, and Alexander Skrzynski, later to become Polish Foreign Minister, and that this had shown that there really was a basis for an understanding, he was greatly pleased and, as long as he remained in the Government, encouraged Skrzynski in all his pro-Russian efforts. When Skrzynski told him that Rakowsky had enquired what the answer would be were the Russians to request permission to move across Poland in a war against Germany, Sikorski said: "I would permit it if the war were being waged in alliance with Poland." '

This attitude was significant. During the first half of 1939 Britain and France were negotiating with the USSR over a defence pact against Hitler. They asked Russia to join with them in guaranteeing Poland in case of German attack. Moscow inquired whether its armies could enter Poland to fight the Nazis in the event of invasion. Colonel Beck, the then Polish Foreign Minister, said no. The negotiations failed and instead, Stalin made a treaty with Hitler. A few days later war broke out.

On the 17 September Russian troops crossed the Polish border. The Polish State, said Moscow, had ceased to exist and the Russian troops came to protect the Ukrainian and Bielorussian population. The territory they occupied was incorporated into the USSR. Diplomatic relations were of course broken off. In order to come to terms with Stalin Sikorski's Government therefore had to resolve the problem of frontiers and of the citizenship of the Poles inside Russia. There was also the question of diplomatic relations, behind which loomed the question of the independence of Poland and non interference in her domestic affairs.

When Sikorski met Churchill on 19 June 1940, they talked among other matters of Polish-Soviet relations. A paragraph in Sikorski's letter to his President referred to that question. A year later, when Hitler attacked Russia, the matter came to the fore. The following notes of Retinger's relate what happened as a result:

> 'Sikorski felt that sentiments should not obscure the realities of politics and history. Emotions pass, but geography remains. And geography has placed Poland between Germany and Russia.
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> 'The collapse of France forced Sikorski to make his policy more realistic than ever. It was a warning against sentiment in politics, and that was why, during his stay in London from 18 to 20 June, 1940, he made his first move towards a rapprochement with Russia, explaining to the British Government that he would be prepared to accept a renewal of relations with the Soviets. Count Raczynski and I were requested to draw up an *aide-mémoire* for the Foreign Office on the subject.

'It must be remembered that one of Sikorski's main objects during the early years of the War was to rebuild the Polish fighting forces, which the collapse of France had shorn of half their numbers, some killed, others taken prisoner, others obliged to seek internment in Switzerland, while many were stranded in France. A large proportion of them had been young men, who by clandestine and dangerous routes escaped from Poland to join their comrades in the West. With the occupation of France and the entry of Italy into the War, this flow of recruits was practically stopped, and the only potential pool was in Russia. We did not know then, nor did we know later, exactly how many had been deported to Russia from the Eastern provinces of Poland, but we estimated the number at about two million. All we had to go on was an article in *Isvestia* in April or May 1941, giving the number of Polish soldiers in the different camps of Russia as about 120,000. In reality, I suppose there must have been about a million and a half. And these Poles Sikorski needed.

'Our *aide-mémoire* recalled the existence of the considerable number of Poles in Russia, and tentatively suggested a kind of tacit truce between the Polish and Russian Governments. It in no way abandoned any of our claims, and protested against the so-called plebiscite which the Russians held in the Eastern provinces. It was suggested that a Polish agent might be added (with the tacit consent of the Russians) to the staff of the British Embassy in Moscow, who might act as go-between the Russians and ourselves.

'This *aide-mémoire* proved the good-will of the Poles and showed that Sikorski's instinct was sound and farsighted. However, nothing came of it, except that it served as a pretext for the first campaign against Sikorski by the more anti-Russian Poles in London. They, however, never knew its contents which were kept secret, all the more so as it was a semi-private document between the two Prime Ministers. They pretended to get their knowledge from a first draft supposed to have been drawn up by Dr Litauer. There had been such a draft, but it had obviously been written in haste, and was so hopeless that I had never even shown it to Sikorski. The final document was written by the Polish Ambassador and myself in the absence of all the other Polish Ministers, and contained not one word by Dr Litauer. The pretext, however, was there and some mischievous and totally erroneous rumours regarding its contents started to circulate among the Poles in England.

'The arrival in London in June 1941 of Sir Stafford Cripps who was then British Ambassador in Moscow gave fresh impetus to Polish–Russian relations. Cripps had come to warn the British Government about the impending invasion of Russia by the Germans. In his opinion war was imminent, and Sikorski and he agreed that something must be done to facilitate a resumption of Polish–Russian relations. This was all the more necessary if war did come, as the persistence of a conflict between the Poles and the Russians might prove a stumbling block in the way of good Anglo-Soviet relations. Cripps did not dispute the hardships the Poles had suffered at the hands of the Russians, but considered them wounds that must be given time to heal. What he wanted was to make the Russian–British alliance that war would inevitably produce, the greatest element for a stable peace and for economic co-operation on a Continental scale once the Germans had been defeated.

'After his conversation with Cripps, Sikorski was convinced that war between Germany and Russia was merely a matter of days, and he immediately made up his mind what policy to adopt. Despite the bad faith of the Russians in 1939 and the treatment they had since meted out to the Poles; despite the antagonism and anti-Russian feelings of the majority of his countrymen, Sikorski felt that an improvement of Polish–Russian relations was essential.

'There were many considerations inclining him to this view. He wanted to help the war effort by improving his own relations with Russia, whom the public and Britain's friends abroad regarded with the utmost distrust; he wanted to alleviate the fate of the Poles in Russia and replenish the Polish fighting forces particularly with the professional officers who were supposed to be in the Russian concentration camps (it was not till the spring of 1943 that we knew of the tragic fate that had overtaken them before our agreement with Russia); and finally he wanted to prepare the way for a post-war collaboration between the two countries and get Russia's backing for his plan for creating federal blocks, which he considered the best safeguard for peace.

'But what animated General Sikorski and myself above all was the thought that we could make a final, historical settlement with the Russians. Here, however, in company with President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, we were wrong.

'The day after the announcement of Germany's attack on Russia

Sikorski had further conversations with Sir Stafford Cripps and General Mason Macfarlane. Having fought the Russians and knowing them well, Sikorski had his own opinion about the Red Army. While most military experts believed Russia would not last more than six weeks to three months, he considered that she would be capable of resisting the Germans, and later backed his opinion by going to Moscow, when the Nazis were only twenty miles or so from its walls.

'After his first conversation with Cripps, Sikorski began preparing the speech which he eventually broadcast on the night of 23 June,* when he took the initiative and met the Russians half way.

'The Russian response was not long in coming. On 4 July, Eden's secretary rang me up to ask if General Sikorski, accompanied only by myself, could call at the Foreign Office as soon as possible.

'When we entered the dark, gloomy room we found Mr Eden alone, and obviously deeply moved. "Mon cher Général," he said, "I have news of the greatest importance for you, but I will not try to convey it in my poor French. Mr Maisky came to see me this afternoon, and I wrote down the minutes of our conversation as soon as he left. Retinger will translate it to you word for word." And he handed me two sheets of the blue-tinted foolscap paper used by the Foreign Office. Sikorski said to me in Polish: "Translate it literally and according to the spirit of it, but do it slowly so as to give me time to digest it and think."

'Maisky's communication began by saying that in view of Germany's aggression, in order that the War might be better conducted, and to help the peoples oppressed by Hitler, the Soviet Government was anxious to create National People's Armies of Yugoslavs, Czechs and Poles, to be officered by their nationals and administered by National Committees. That of the Poles was reckoned at 20,000. This important statement was followed by many paragraphs of technical and political matter, and the declaration ended by saying that communications with the head of the Polish Government through the good offices of the British Government would be welcomed.

'The General never gave better proof of his quickness of mind and decision than at this historic moment. As soon as I had finished translating the English text, he made what was really a statement defining the Polish point of view and what was to become his policy. His points were these:

1. The Polish Government cannot admit of any kind of foreign interference in matters affecting the attributes of Polish sovereignty.
2. It cannot admit of any Polish authority outside its own.
3. Consequently, it would not recognize or collaborate with any National Committee unless it were created by the Polish Government and acted on its instructions.
4. All Poles, wherever they may be, must obey the instructions of the legitimate Polish Government.
5. Therefore the Polish fighting forces, by whomever created and wherever fighting, must be under the orders of the Polish Supreme Command, although they might operate under the operational orders of an Allied Supreme Commander, as long as the Polish C-in-C authorized them to do so, just as during the last War British soldiers accepted operational orders from a French Commander-in-Chief.

Sikorski declared, as head of the Polish Government, that he was ready to negotiate an agreement with the Soviet Government on the following preliminary conditions:

1. Polish sovereignty must be fully respected.
2. All previous agreements concerning Poland concluded between the Russian and German governments before the year 1940 must be declared null and void.
3. Relations between Poland and Russia must be based once more on the provisions of the treaties binding the two countries, namely the Treaty of Riga and the Polish–Russian Pact of Non-Aggression and its subsequent Protocol.
4. All Poles in concentration camps, jails, or deported, to be freed and allowed freedom of movement, and to be put under the care of the Polish authorities. Provision to be made for compensation for damage to property occasioned by the Russian invasion of Poland in 1939 and for the forcible deportation of the Poles to Russia.
5. A sovereign and independent Polish Army to be formed immediately by officers appointed by the Polish C-in-C, to fight against the Germans, and that this should for the time being be under Russian supreme operational command.

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*1941.

6 The immediate exchange of diplomatic representatives.

'Finally, Sikorski declared that he would consider any such arrangement with the Soviets as a prelude to a general policy of mutual collaboration, and that he would like to make the proposed agreement a turning point in Polish-Russian relations. He disputed the figure of twenty thousand Polish soldiers, referring to the *Isvestia* statistics mentioned previously.

'It was decided that Mr Eden would notify Mr Maisky of General Sikorski's reply and arrange for a meeting between them. Shortly afterwards Eden informed the General that Maisky had reported the Soviet Government's acceptance of his thesis as a basis for negotiations. There followed two joint conferences between Sikorski, Maisky, Eden and August Zaleski, the Polish Foreign Minister, at which, however, no headway was made, and it was then suggested that Eden should act as go-between, which would enable both parties to speak their minds freely without wounding anyone's susceptibilities. It also enabled the Foreign Secretary to keep the British Ambassador in Moscow fully informed, so that he could, if necessary, report to Molotov or even to Stalin, and so make sure that the Russian despatches from London were not biased. This procedure was all the more sensible as Mainsky had at the very outset announced that he could only act as a letter-box and had no authority to make any binding promises, while we knew Stafford Cripps' sense of fairness, and his eagerness to bring the negotiations to a successful issue.

'After this we had constant meetings with the British. I accompanied the General, and William Strang assisted Mr Eden. Occasionally Sir Orme Sargent or Sir Alexander Cadogan would be present at the meeting. Anthony Eden was tireless. Full of goodwill, and endlessly tactful, he was a tremendous help. And he knew his subject. Of course this was an almost vital task for British diplomacy, for it was obvious that you could not have a good and sincere alliance with Russia unless Poland was, I don't say satisfied, but at least sufficiently appeased. In those days the Poles were very popular with the British public for what they had done in Norway and during the Battle of Britain and, because at that time they were the Empire's only fighting ally. (Moreover only two years had elapsed since the conclusion of the Polish-British alliance.) It was also obvious that for

3. General Sikorski and Retinger, May 1941

4 (a) Sir Stafford Cripps greets Retinger on his arrival in Moscow in August 1941

4 (b) Retinger with Polish soldiers in Germany, 1945

Britain to let the existing state of enmity between Russia and Poland continue, and just turn a blind eye to it, might affect the remaining neutral countries and react badly on Britain's credit, especially in the United States with its millions of voters of Polish origin. There was, too, I suppose, the personal element. This was almost the most important job Eden had had to tackle since Churchill had reinstated him at the Foreign Office, and his reputation depended to a certain extent on the way he handled it. We knew this, and he knew that we knew it. But all the same, throughout the entire negotiations my impression was that he was absolutely unbiased. He never bullied, and often made excellent suggestions that Sikorski was glad to accept.

'During these negotiations Sikorski and Eden became great friends. It could hardly have been otherwise, for both were so patently honest, both had great personal charm, and both showed the greatest patience – Eden because he was patient by nature, Sikorski because he had to be.

'They were dealing with a new chapter in international history and that at an extremely dangerous period, so that not merely the general outline, but every detail had to be discussed; for both Poland and Russia, whose future collaboration was being debated, depended at that time on the friendship of England. These were matters impossible to thrash out in the stiff formality of an office, especially as both sides had innumerable other matters to attend to, so we generally met for lunch or dinner in a private room in the Savoy or the Dorchester, or else in Eden's modest suite at the Foreign Office. Eden spoke in English and Sikorski in Polish and I acted as interpreter. Both spoke fluent French, but they preferred to stick to their own language to avoid the least misunderstanding, and only dropped into French when the purely business part of their conversation was over and there was a little time left for personal and political gossip. Though Sikorski never learned English properly, he ended by understanding it well enough to follow my translations, and would sometimes interrupt me when he considered that I had not quite expressed his thought or had omitted some of his discourse. The lengthy talks between these two were not confined to Polish affairs; they embraced the whole world. The two statesmen exchanged comments on the most important events of the day and were, I must say, somewhat indiscreet. But then they trusted each other. Indiscretion between friends is certainly most conducive to creative politics.

'It must not be imagined, however, that every talk they had was smooth, sauve and diplomatic. There were points that had to be fought over, and the aggressor was nearly always Sikorski. He fought for his ground tenaciously and sometimes furiously. Once when we were driving together to the Savoy to meet Eden, whom Sikorski thought was giving way to the Russians too much, he asked me: "Can't you think of some good historical phrase that would annoy Eden?" Palmerston's famous saying flashed through my mind, and I said: "Remind him of Palmerston, who said that one day a Kalmouk Prince would rule over England." Eden was already waiting when we went into the private room at the Savoy, and Sikorski weighed straight into him with Palmerston, adding: "And Maisky looks like a Kalmouk."

'Grand fighter that he was, Sikorski knew when he was defeated. The first paragraph of our agreement with Russia proved a terrible bone of contention. Eden wanted it one way and Sikorski another, and neither would budge. The whole dinner was poised ineffectively in mid-air, and we saw that we were not going to be able to have our phrasing. Then Eden passed Sikorski a glass of brandy and, taking it, the General said: "You know that Retinger always drinks for me, but this time I'll let myself be sold to the English rather than to the Russians. I accept your glass and your phrase."

'During these negotiations, the success of which meant not only the liberation of thousands of Poles from the horrors of Russian life and the reinforcement of our fighting forces, but that Poland would have an important part to play in world politics, deplorable bickerings broke out among the Poles in London. We had sounded our countrymen in Poland the moment we began thinking of making a settlement with Russia, and their approval had seemed unanimous. This was despite the Poles' almost universal resentment of Russia, who, by concluding the Ribbentrop–Molotov agreement, had let Germany declare war on Poland and the Western world and who herself had invaded Poland when she was defenceless. One had to remember the hardships of the Poles who had been deported to Russia, and the whole history of Polish–Russian relations to appreciate all the difficulties General Sikorski and his collaborators had to overcome if they were to achieve the rapprochement and the new deal for which they hoped.

'The opposition among the exiled Poles was due to several factors. First there was the old hereditary hatred of Russia, now freshly

inflamed by recent events; secondly there was the conviction that Great Britain and America would in the end find it necessary to move against Russia; thirdly there was the attitude that preferred death in a futile struggle to a dishonourable compromise – the nationalist jingoism of the diehards.

'One leading official of the Polish Foreign Office told General Sikorski that as a little boy he had thrown stones at a squadron of Cossacks in the streets of Vilno, and that recently his mother had been deported to the steppes of Kazakstan and had died there, so how could he, etc, etc. Many people still thought in terms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Poland on several occasions defeated the Russians, and since Pilsudski had done so again in 1920, they could not see why history should not repeat itself once more. They were the ones who despised the Russians; they could not believe that Russia would be able to resist for long (an opinion shared by the vast majority of British and American military experts), and thought it would soon disintegrate. This was a belief which no amount of discussion could change. They would not listen to us when we tried to explain that any such disintegration would be of short duration, because Russia was a great country, not only in achievement, but, what is more important, in the number of its people and its geographical size. The Russian State as such has an enormous centripetal attraction that must eventually prevail and enable her to emerge again as a powerful State.

'The jingoists were politicians of the Utopian school. Most of them, even most of the civilians, belonged to the praetorian group that had surrounded Pilsudski and his successor, Rydz-Smigly, and were all the more vociferous because they had once been the ruling party, occupying all the higher posts, especially in the Army, and now resented being in opposition. They were bound together by ties of comradeship from the days of the last War. They resembled nothing so much as the "colonels" of Cromwell's time, and indeed, in Poland it was as "the colonels" that they had been known. Most were of humble origin, yet they let themselves be guided by the diehard spirit of the *szlachta*, the squirearchy of Poland, that had been so disastrous for the country in the eighteenth century.

'Communist propaganda was wrong in calling them feudal and the representatives of the big landowners' interests. If anything, the reverse was the case, and the big landowners were merely their hangers-on. However, they expressed the megalomania of Polish politics. They were the "anti" party, something like the pre-war Action Française in France; anti-Semitic, anti-Ukrainian, anti-Czech, anti-German, but above all, anti-Russian. Sikorski had been forced to make use of them in re-organizing the Polish fighting forces, and now having staged a come-back they had a chance to avenge themselves. This, they thought, was an opportunity to smash Sikorski.

'I should like to emphasize the great courage of Sikorski at that time. The fear and mistrust of the Russians was so great in those days that very few of the Poles in London were in whole-hearted agreement with him, albeit later nearly everyone came to agree that the General was right in the main.

'Sikorski's work was in danger of being sabotaged by the vast number of Polish politicians assembled in London. The anti-Russian group was led by General Sosnkowski, an old friend of Pilsudski, by August Zaleski, who was Foreign Minister at the time, and by Marjan Seyda, a leader of the National Democrats, and all three resigned from office before the agreement was concluded. They were all supported by President Raczkiewicz.

'Then there was Jan Stanczyk, the head of the Polish socialists in London, who also strongly opposed the agreement. Not knowing how to deal with him, I appealed to Hugh Dalton, who at that time was Minister for Economic Warfare. He was one of the leaders of the British Labour Party who was in close touch with the Polish socialists, and I asked him to try to make Stanczyk see reason. He rang him up and never in my life had I heard such a brow-beating and such stern admonitions as on that occasion.

'Had the agreement been carried out with less difficulty; had sentiment not outweighed facts and reason in the minds of so many; had there been confidence and goodwill on both sides once it had been made, we Poles would not have ended up in the situation in which we did, nor would the Soviets have plausible pretexts for exonerating themselves in the eyes of public opinion.

'How futile were the arguments! I remember, for instance, how a few days before he broke with the Government, General Sosnkowski, the most intelligent of Sikorski's opponents, invited me to dinner, and for several hours tried to convince me how wrong we were. His strongest argument was that we should, at least, wait another few weeks, because Russia would be utterly crushed by then

and bound to grant us much better terms. Well, Russia was not crushed. And then again, we wanted to conclude our agreement at the time of Russia's weakness, because we thought that with an added sense of gratitude she would be more likely to keep her promises. Besides, there is a spirit of charity that even the weaker must possess.

'A few hours before the signature of the agreement the President came to Sikorski and most solemnly warned him against signing it, as it would never receive his sanction. Luckily we were prepared for this, and did not need it. We had heard a few days previously that the President would not sign the agreement and was going to notify the General that he would not empower him to sign it either. With Sikorski's permission I went to see William Strang at the Foreign Office and put the case to him. The Foreign Office's legal advisers were called in, and finally it was decided that since the treaty between Russia and Britain had been signed only by the British Ambassador in Moscow and Molotov, similarly it would not be necessary for this agreement to bear the President's signature, all the more so as the Foreign Office had been informed that Maisky was not going to ask for an exchange of credentials and powers, seeing that he was dealing with the head of the Government.

'Towards the end of the negotiations the Polish boycott of Sikorski took a drastic turn for the worse. Four members of the Cabinet resigned as a protest against the agreement, and did so a couple of hours before a meeting at which Eden was to explain the British point of view to the members of the government and other Polish personalities.

'There were some last-minute difficulties about the treaties between Germany and Russia being considered null and void, the liberation of Polish prisoners in Russia, and about the damages to be paid to the Poles. These were finally removed by Sir Stafford Cripps who went to see Stalin himself. Stalin accepted our demands, but insisted that the question of damages be put in a secret protocol, a precedent for Soviet diplomacy which had always protested against any secret diplomacy. Alas! one grave mistake was made in the English text of the treaty, which there was no time to put right. In the clause about the prisoners in Russia, the word "amnesty" was used instead of "release". I am afraid that the responsibility for this lies on the shoulders of a good Polish diplomat, Mr Potulicki, who drafted this document. This mistake gave grounds for fierce attacks on General Sikorski, which continued for a long time. The distinction between "amnesty" and "release" was important in so far as it referred to the principal bone of contention between the Russians and the Poles. The Russians claimed that the territories they occupied in 1939 were Russian and that by virtue of a referendum they "organized" its inhabitants were Russian citizens. The Poles, who hotly denied it, were extremely sensitive to anything that touched upon this issue. Sikorski's critics contended that an "amnesty" could only be granted by a State to its own citizens and that therefore use of this word meant an implicit recognition of the Russian claim.

'At last came the day for signing the agreement, 30 July 1941. We used the room generally occupied by the Foreign Secretary, dark, gloomy room furnished with rich Victorian furniture of super-Forsythe taste. There was Mr Maisky and a group of diplomats, Sikorski, Mr Stronski, Professor Kot, Mr Balinski from the Polish Embassy (the Ambassador was in hospital), Mr Potulicki and myself, Mr Eden, Sir Alexander Cadogan, Sir Orme Sargent, William Strang, Frank Roberts, Oliver Harvey and, of course, a group of photographers and people from the BBC. Then, to the surprise of everybody, Winston Churchill arrived.

'A large, long table had been placed by the window, and here, their backs to the light, sat Churchill, Eden and Maisky and an embassy councillor at the other end facing us. There was a score of chairs for the rest along the other side of the table facing the window.

'Mr Eden opened the proceedings with a short routine speech, and was followed by General Sikorski and Mr Maisky. Then Churchill stood up. In an earnest voice he said: "I trust that this agreement will put an end to the quarrel which had lasted for three hundred years between the Poles and the Russians. This sheet of paper is a new page in history that I am honoured to witness." Churchill looked tired, and he was deeply and visibly moved. There were quivers in his voice, and tears in his eyes.

'After the signature of the treaty there was some small talk, of which I remember only one thing that I was to recall later in Moscow. Maisky asked: "Who is going to be your Commander-in-Chief in Russia?" As the General was standing near I turned to him and repeated Maisky's question. "General Anders," he answered. "I see," said Maisky, "General Wladyslaw Anders." And by the use of the Christian name proved that he knew about him.

'After the signature, we sent a young secretary, Mr. Arlet, to Moscow, as well as General Szyszko-Bohusz as the head of our Military Mission. General Sikorski also nominated Professor Kot to be the first Ambassador. However, Professor Kot's departure was delayed, as he announced that it would take him about six weeks to get himself and his staff ready, and that he would be unable to leave before then.

'One Saturday, while General Sikorski was visiting the Polish forces in Scotland, Mr Eden rang me up asking me to leave on Monday for Moscow, to represent Polish interests there. Eden said he would like me to go, since I was, after Sikorski, the most important person in the negotiations, and added that from the Polish point of view speed was essential.

'I could not possibly discuss this matter with General Sikorski over the telephone, so the following day I went to see him in Scotland. Owing to bad weather we arrived very late, but I had time for a long talk with the General, who accepted the plan. He gave me only a few instructions, saying that I knew as much as he did about the matter. He told me to uphold the dignity of Poland, and to try to get as many Poles as possible released from jails and concentration camps in order to build up Polish forces in Russia under the command of General Haller, if he was still alive, or, if not, of General Anders.

'The weather was too bad to fly back to London, so I took the night train, and soon after my arrival went to the Foreign Office. After a final talk with William Strang I left for Invergordon, and from there travelled on a Catalina to Archangel. With me were two or three naval officers who were going to help the Russian Fleet in the Black Sea and in Murmansk. Owing to a leak in the petrol tank, which was not discovered until it was too late, the Catalina broke down and we landed on the water, luckily not far from Kirkwall in the Orkney Islands. Our pilot wirelessed for help, and within three hours the necessary petrol arrived. We reached our destination the following evening without further incident, and landed on the Dvina, near Archangel. It was the longest flight I had ever made; twenty-three hours without stopping from Kirkwall, and it was frightfully cold, since we were travelling north of the Scandinavian Peninsula.

'But what a warm reception awaited me! The Russian Admiral in Command was there, with many officers, and they took me to the

Tsar's yacht which was moored on the Dvina, and had been converted into a reception place for important visitors. Later dinner was served on the yacht, a dinner which I, coming from starving Britain, could hardly get through. After eating for about two hours, my hosts told me that we had only had the *hors d'œuvres*.

'Then we had a run on the Dvina Basin, near Archangel, but when I asked to be shown Archangel they refused, giving some "logical, natural reasons". The following day I was taken to a plane which looked to me exactly like a DC3, and as a matter of fact some American markings were visible under the new paint, but when I asked what the plane was I was told that that particular type was being manufactured in Russia. We flew to Moscow, over endless beautiful forests, but as we flew very low I was also able to observe many interesting sights: for instance, two big settlements surrounded by barbed wire and guns, which I learned later were labour camps.

'On my arrival in Moscow I was met by people from the Protocol, the British Ambassador, several other official representatives, two or three Poles who had already been released by the Russians, as well as by a crowd of about five thousand people. But what pleased me more than anything was the fact that I was greeted not only by the Communist Internationale, but also by the Polish National Anthem.'

5

The reason for this fanfare suddenly became clear. A misunderstanding occurred, as a result of which Retinger became a diplomatic official for the first and only time in his life. The story is explained in a letter he wrote the next day to Sikorski in London.

'Moscow,
14 August 1941

'After a thirty hour journey I landed yesterday afternoon in Moscow, where to my great surprise I was greeted not only by our people and Cripps, but also by Soviet high officials. I was told right away that the Russian Government thought that I came as Chargé d'Affaires in order to resume diplomatic relations, and that as a result an order was published the day before liberating all the imprisoned Poles.

'I said to Bohusz, Arlet and Cripps – but to no one else – that not only had no such authority been given me in London but that I had also arranged to return by the same plane, and that I was only acting as informant both to you and the Poles here. All three of them insisted that it is absolutely necessary to obtain credentials as Chargé d'Affaires, as otherwise we shall lose face with the Russian Government and, moreover, it will greatly delay the liberation of our people, the signature of the military agreement, the formation of armed forces and adversely affect our prestige. Hence the telegrams from Bohusz, Cripps and myself.

'Yesterday I saw Anders, Szczyrek and Januszajtis. I can say on the basis of my talks with them and the members of the Polish mission here and the numerous cables which Bohusz has received from all over Russia, that the Poles reacted to the agreement you made with unanimous and enthusiastic approval.

'Anders says that according to intelligence reports the response in Poland is identical. All those who know the attitude of the Ministers who resigned are indignant. "If Sosnkowski does not like this agreement," Anders told me, "he should get out, because he is either stupid or in bad faith." They, like us, believe this agreement is both the only possible one and a very good one, since it opens up possibilities for the future.

'In general they tell me that you are extremely popular among the Poles here and highly regarded by the Russian Government, who trust you as a man who keeps his word, has the courage of his convictions and dares to take decisions.

'As you know from Bohusz's letter, our people are full of optimism as regards the formation of an Army. I like Anders who is manifestly sincere and honest and devoted to you.

'Januszajtis, though a National Democrat, is more impartial than I expected. He cannot understand the attitude of Bielecki and Seyda and strongly disapproves of it.'

In spite of good will on the part of the Soviet Government, the freeing of people from jails and labour camps was meeting with many difficulties. Camp commanders were reluctant to lose sometimes considerable numbers of workers, while the police were often suspicious. Some of these troubles are related in another of Retinger's letters to Sikorski:

'During the first week following my arrival Soviet authorities were rather slow in freeing our citizens. Hence my note of the 21st and a firm talk with Vyshinsky on the 24th. As a result of it, the implementation of instructions is confirmed by numerous telegrams from Poles from all over Russia.

'Vyshinsky said that the release of the prisoners proceeds slowly as they are afraid they might let out by mistake some German spies. It is better – he said – that a hundred innnocents should suffer rather than one spy be let free and create much harm. I got a bit angry, and said that we Poles are the best judges, and that we know of many cases when "lesser" Soviet officials forced prominent Poles to sign declarations that they were spies, only to have a weapon against them, and that in spite of it many were released as it was known that spying was only a pretext. After a short argument Vyshinsky agreed to release those for whom we shall take responsibility. He will also give us files about the suspects and if we give a favourable opinion will release them.

'That, as well as the implementation of the agreement of their own free will, I regard as a great success.'

In Retinger's notes there is also the following passage relating to his stay in Moscow:

'My first task was to try to have the Poles released from concentration camps, labour camps and jails. I must confess that during the whole of my stay in Russia, which lasted about six weeks, I met with nothing but courtesy from the Russian officials, who showed great goodwill, and every desire to keep their promises. For instance, at the precise moment of my arrival in Archangel the Russian wireless broadcast all over Russia that the Poles were to be released and permitted to travel wherever they wished, so as to be able to get in touch with the Polish Embassy; join their relatives, and enlist in the Polish forces.

'A few weeks later I heard a very thrilling narrative about this broadcast from Jan Kwapinski, who before the War was the Chairman of the Polish trade unions, and later in London became the Minister for Commerce. He told me that he had been in a jail in the north of Russia. He was treated in the same way as the other prisoners. The things of which he complained most bitterly were the interminable interrogations to which he was being subjected, mostly

at night. In common with the other prisoners, he had had abominable food and very poor living quarters. The one respect in which he had been slightly better treated than the others was that his interrogators offered him an occasional cigarette, and did not cross-examine him with the usual rudeness and harshness. Suddenly, about the time of my arrival, he was called to the office of the Jail Warden, who asked him whether he knew anyone named Retinger. Kwapinski was a great friend of mine, but he knew nothing of what had happened abroad, so was afraid to say too much in case of compromising me, and merely replied that he used to see me frequently before the War. The Warden then told him that I had arrived, that all the Poles would be released, and that he would be freed. He was also told that the Soviets and Poles had made an agreement.

'So far as I could find out, the same thing happened all over Russia, with the possible exception of those jails, especially in Moscow, in which the prisoners were kept completely incommunicado, and in which the charges against their anti-Soviet attitude had been specially serious.

'When I arrived in Moscow, not more than five or six Poles had already been released. The first I saw was General Anders, of whom I had heard a great deal but whom I had never met personally. He had been caught when fighting the Germans in September 1939 and wounded several times – as it happened, on the same day, by both the Germans and the Russians. (This must surely be a record: to be wounded the same day by two different enemies.) Anders had spent most of his time in the famous Lubianka Jail in Moscow, where he had been treated very badly. Like most of the men I saw who had spent some time in Russian jails he did not care to speak of his experiences. But one thing I learned was that General Anders' wounds had never been treated. When I saw him he looked very ill and was walking on crutches, although fortunately he was in very fine spirits, full of energy and amazingly youthful.'

6

At the beginning of October, Retinger was back in London, but not for long. At the end of the month he set out again to accompany Sikorski to Russia. They went through the Middle East and made a trip to Tobruk. As a result Retinger could claim to have been the only civilian to have been there while the place was under siege.

The party included Major Victor Cazalet, a distinguished Member of Parliament, whom Churchill appointed as his personal liaison officer with Sikorski. This is how he described in notes to his family and friends the arrival at Tobruk:

> 'The twenty-four hours we spent at Tobruk were definitely the most interesting, exhilarating and inspiring of our whole tour. The object of our visit was to see the Polish Brigade who were holding the Western Perimeter and who had been sent up to relieve the Australians. They were commanded by General Kopanski, a typically delightful and gallant Pole. A Czech and an Australian battalion were included in the Polish command.
>
> 'Mr Churchill had promised Sikorski that he should visit his Poles at Tobruk if it were possible. Many objections were put in our way, but finally Admiral Cunningham said that we could go as soon as the moon had waned sufficiently. The reason for this was that during the last four hours going towards Tobruk and the first four hours in coming away, vessels were well within the bombing zone of the enemy and beyond any effective protection from our own planes. The last convoy that had come out had left it a little late, had been very heavily bombed, and as a result we had lost one of our best and latest minelayers. Here is our story.
>
> 'A description of how we got in and out of Tobruk harbour is, I think, one of the best tributes to the magnificent work which the Navy performed during all the long months that they supplied and maintained the garrison. The waters outside the harbour are constantly mined. At nine o'clock after manoeuvring our way through various difficulties we arrived outside Tobruk.
>
> 'In the harbour itself there are twenty-eight known wrecks of ships of every size. On none of these was there any light whatsoever. There is no proper quay or landing stage so we crept up to one of the wrecks, put a plank down from the destroyer to the wreck, and walked over the wreck on to the land. I should add that there were three hundred officers and soldiers on board – all needless to say, carrying more kit than regulation prescribed and one hundred and fifty sick and wounded on land waiting to be taken away by our destroyer. The getting off and the getting on had all to be done in two hours in complete darkness without even the use of a torch or at match.

> 'It is not difficult to imagine that such conditions were conducive to some cursing and confusion. There was plenty of both. It reminded me greatly of taking a ration party up the trenches in the last war and meeting another party coming down.
>
> 'We finally got ashore and unloaded the most precious cargo of all, namely, twenty-five cases of whisky. I must admit some of it disappeared in the night, but quite a fair proportion eventually found its way to the Polish troops. We lost ourselves several times getting on shore. We were carrying our own blankets and bags and I had Retinger, who cannot see at all at night, carrying his bags and blankets, hanging on to my arm, constantly being pushed off the pathway by soldiers coming down to the ship. Incidentally, he was the only civilian who ever went into Tobruk. We then had to climb forty steps on to the highway above and eventually collected all our party and got into Polish cars which were waiting for us.'

By mid-November the party arrived in Baku.

> 'Before beginning the story of our three weeks' stay in Russia, I want to make the following observation, as it is against the background of these preliminary remarks that my other impressions should be considered.
>
> 'Russia is winning the War for themselves and incidentally for us. The Germans are being killed in vast numbers. If, after victory, we continue to live in England in even a relatively free condition of politics and economics, it will be because millions of so-called communists have died to help us defeat the Germans. No one has yet suggested how we should have ever won the War until Russia had been attacked by Germany.
>
> 'Very little really changes in Russia. It is just different people doing the same things under different names.
>
> 'The Germans are being defeated by exactly the same enemies as were Charles XII of Sweden and Napoleon – the size of Russia, the coldness of the winter, and the inherent bravery of her people.
>
> 'In Russia the individual simply doesn't count. There are always hundreds and thousands and millions more. Let me give you an example of what I mean.
>
> 'The story of the aerodrome near Murmansk illustrates my point and goes some way to answer the question – as to how things get

done in Russia. When we decided to send some squadrons of fighters to Russia, one of our own flying officers went up to look around. He was taken up in the air by a Russian pilot – and a piece of ground was pointed out where he was informed the British aerodrome was to be. He looked down and saw forests and marsh. When he appeared somewhat surprised, the Russian said, "We shall have an aerodrome ready for you there in a month."

'Twenty thousand Russian political prisoners were turned on to clear and drain this area. When the work was not going fast enough another ten thousand were allocated for it. In six weeks, I am informed there was a perfect aerodrome, with sheds and concrete runways.

'On landing at Baku we were met and entertained exactly as we might have been by some former Grand Duke who happened to be Governor of the Caucasus. All the local dignitaries, the Chef du Protocol from Kuibyshev and eight special NKVD* were sent from Moscow to be attached to Sikorski while he was in Russia. On the whole they were very pleasant folk who thoroughly enjoyed the good fare with which we were regularly entertained. A fleet of cars took us into the town where we lodged in the best ex-tourist hotel in Russia. It had baths and running water. I shared a room with a very pleasant American, Colonel Griffith. The climate at Baku is always moderate and the people look well fed and clothed.

'The streets and houses and everyone's clothes were dreary and drab, but that's the case everywhere in Russia. Every door and window frame wants a new coat of paint and has wanted it for years.

'We arrived at 3 pm, and were very hungry. Some food, we were told, would be served at 4. "Some" food was served at 4. A banquet for twenty-four which cannot have been excelled for excellence and size in any previous régime.

'This "caviare business" with which every visitor to Russia comes back so impressed, is really nothing but the old-fashioned Russian hospitality. Food and drink, caviare and vodka, they have been synonymous for years with Russian hospitality. The Russians have an inate and traditional love for entertaining. Nothing is too good for the guest. Any Russian officer considers himself a cissy if he can't out-drink his guest. Just as it was in the olden days. As I am a teetotaller and as toasts are exchanged between every course, I had to use some ingenuity to avoid a show of unfriendliness. Luckily water looks very like vodka.

'After half an hour of caviare, the best in the world, ham, all kinds of fish, onions, tomatoes, cucumbers and innumerable other small dishes, dinner began. Soup – bortsch with lovely pastry cakes, fish – sturgeon, huge wings of chicken, cauliflower *au gratin*, a sweet, then tangerines, coffee, biscuits and chocolates and, of course, all the wines from vodka to brandy.

'By 6 we were weary with trying to eat and drink and sitting next to Russians, the kindest of hosts, who, alas, could not speak a word of any language except their own.

'After two hours' well-earned rest we went off to the Opera – a fair performance of *Prince Igor*. In the entr'acte another feast of caviare and tangerines. It was really rather shocking how much one ate.'

From Baku the party went to Kuibyshev where part of the administration and all the diplomatic corps had been evacuated. Stalin, however, remained in Moscow and Sikorski went to see him there. The record of what went on in Moscow has been published recently and is available to the student of this period of history. But the mood of the moment is best conveyed by this note of Major Cazalet written shortly after the event:

> 'After two days in Kuibyshev Sikorski went off to Moscow with General Anders and Ambassador Kot. They told me that the Russians would be very suspicious if I went with them so I had to stay behind. Actually General Macfarlane went to Moscow, but the Russians would not ask him to any banquets given for the Poles. General Sikorski told me his talks with Stalin were most successful. Stalin, it seems, is very pro-Polish. Apparently he had received some friendly treatment in Poland during his youth. He pleased Sikorski very much as he opened their conversation by telling him how much he admired his book on modern warfare.
>
> 'As a result of the interview Stalin agreed to allow twenty-five thousand Poles to go out of Russia to provide reinforcements in the Middle East and at home. He agreed that the size of the Polish Army should only be limited by the number of Poles available. He appeared very angry when he was told how little equipment had been given them. He promised to move all of them down to an area in Tashkent.

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*Now KGB. The Soviet security police.

He also said that all the Polish civilian ex-prisoners who had not obtained jobs as free citizens should also be moved down to the same area.

'He gave express orders that official representatives from the Polish Embassy in Russia should be allowed to visit any labour camp where they thought there might be any Poles.

'Nothing could have been more friendly and Stalin begged him to come back again and discuss the eastern boundary of Poland. It was arranged that the Polish Army for the time being should consist of six to seven divisions, and that the Russians would feed them, but the English and Americans must provide the equipment. From the very moment the interview took place the attitude of every official in Russia changed towards the Poles.

'Stalin gave a dinner for Sikorski after their talk at which Sikorski counted thirty-five different items on the menu. After it had been going on for about two hours, Stalin saw that Sikorski was eating nothing more, so he countermanded the rest of the dinner and took him off to a cinema. At midnight he took him up to his room and signed the Polish–Soviet agreement.

'The next day Sikorski broadcast from Moscow, an English translation of which I did from Kuibyshev. Sikorski returned the following day. Apparently Stalin, who had never had much use for the Commintern, has now banished it to Novo Sybirsk, some two thousand miles from Moscow. Sikorski thinks that he has abandoned altogether the idea of world revolution for the time being and wishes to play the rôle of honest statesman.'

This was the beginning of December 1941. The German offensive, snowbound, was halted at the gates of Moscow. The crisis had been averted by a hair's breadth, but the situation was still precarious and the future uncertain. Stalin was on his best behaviour.

Over a quarter of a century has elapsed since those days and today nothing can illustrate better what it was all about than Victor Cazalet's vivid description of the remaining part of the Russian trip:

'After Sikorski had come back to Kuibyshev he was ill for several days and we could not start on the tour of the Polish camps until Wednesday 10 December. We then went off in a special train which for comfort and luxury could not have been bettered in pre-war Europe. Fifteen different dishes graced our breakfast table. Vyshinsky was deputed by Stalin to come round with us and see for himself what the conditions were like.

'Before describing the camps perhaps I better explain how these Poles got there. After the Russians had invaded Poland they deported anything between a million and a half and two million men, women and children to Russia. They scattered them about in labour camps from the most northerly point in Russia to the extreme parts of Siberia. Under the Polish–Soviet Agreement they were all released. Some of them, however, were in camps too far distant ever to get the news of their release before winter had set in. The difficulty of communicating over these vast areas also prevented the orders being carried out in certain camps for some time. There are, for instance, still some twenty-five thousand in the province of Archangel who cannot be released because of transport conditions. There are five thousand on the island of Novayazemla who will not be able to get south until late this summer. There are another thousand at least several hundred miles beyond Yakutsk which was the furthest point to which the Tsarist régime ever sent political prisoners. There are only two months in the year in this part of Siberia in which communications exist with the rest of the world.

'A great many, of course, had died; a great many more will die this year. Life in these camps follows much the same routine of which the following is a fair example. The prisoners are wakened up about two o'clock in the morning. They are given some hot water and about three-quarters of a pound of bread. A lecture is delivered then on how and why they should become good Soviet citizens. They then march out to their allotted tasks, i.e. timber cutting, rail- or road-making or digging canals: they work at their allotted task for twelve hours. They are then marched back and given some porridge and some more bread. After that they lie down on the mud floors of their houses and sleep if they can. Every ten days or so they are given some fats and allowed to wash.

'This, of course, sounds pretty terrible – so it is, but two things must be considered. There is very little deliberate cruelty as there undoubtedly is in German concentration camps. The NKVD which administers all these camps are the Government contractors. They have got to get certain jobs done, and if they fail they know they are for it and probably will find themselves in a labour camp next year.

'The Poles are treated no worse than the Russian political prisoners. One of the Russian Generals in an expansive moment after dinner, replying to a question addressed him by a Pole as to why they had deported so many Poles, said "I don't know why you complain so bitterly. There are twenty millions of our own people living under the same conditions, and we treat the Poles exactly as we treat our own people." That, I am sure, is true.

'From among those who have been released, some forty thousand have now found their way to these military centres which we visited. The headquarters are at Buzuluk. Here the Poles, who only numbered about two thousand, had already got their British uniforms. There was quite a number of Polish women who were all doing military work of some kind. I went to tea with two of them who lived with their mother in one room of a two-roomed cottage. The other room was occupied by the owner. In this one room they have a huge stove, a few bits of furniture and electric light.

'They were people of superior education who had always lived well. They immediately insisted on giving us food – sardines, bread and butter and cucumbers. We were very loath to take it, as I am sure it was all they had. They told us how they regarded this little haven of home and privacy as "absolute heaven" after what they had been through. To be there as free Polish citizens, to be united again, to have the privacy of a room to themselves – these were the joys which made them forget the terrible experiences of the past two years. I have never seen such disinterestedness, unselfishness and magnificent spirit.

'In the evening, as at both the other camps we visited, there was, first of all, a concert given by the Poles and then a banquet. At these feasts we had five-course dinners, unlimited vodka and wine, and in one case huge chocolate cakes. The food was excellent as was the drink. It was really a fantastic experience eating with the Russians and drinking toasts to each other while outside there were thousands of semi-starved men.

'Let me describe our day at Toskoye. It was very cold, thirty degrees of frost, and there were some twenty thousand Poles in this camp. Every man looked half-starved. Their faces were grey, quite a different colour from those of ordinary people. Most of them looked as if they had also been frost-bitten. They were living in tents. There were no houses, no wood except that which they pulled down with their hands, no YMCA huts, no cinemas or shops, no town or village to which they could go. Many of their companions had died of cold or sheer physical exhaustion in their two long years of imprisonment.

'Yet when these men marched by in their British overcoats (the rest of the British clothes had not yet been distributed) they showed a spirit which was truly remarkable. They thought themselves in heaven after two years in labour camps. They always produced a band and a first-rate concert; in one camp an orchestra played the overture to Beethoven's *Egmont*. They also sang three verses of *Tipperary* in English. One felt that one could never complain of anything again.

'The other camp we visited the next day was somewhat better as regards conditions. I will only describe our experience after we left it. On Sunday 14 December, we had spent the whole day visiting a camp at Tatischev. We got into our train about 7.30 pm feeling very tired. At 9.15 we arrived at Saratov, a large industrial city on the Volga, two hundred miles south of Kuibyshev.

'The local authorities had been warned from Moscow that General Sikorski might arrive there one evening and to make all preparations for his visit. We were met at the station by a fleet of motor cars, which took us off to the theatre, which had been completely reserved for us in case we should arrive that night. We were received by a band of forty who played the Polish national anthem through two or three times. Then we were introduced to a group of distinguished Russian actors, all wearing the Order of Lenin. The Moscow Art Theatre, which is without doubt the finest theatrical guild in the world, had been evacuated to Saratov, and they put on for our benefit a performance of Tchekov's *Three Sisters*. Although the greater part of the play was unintelligible to me, I and the others who likewise did not understand Russian, sat spellbound for the best part of four hours by this superb production. The acting, speaking, technique, staging – everything was of the highest possible order.

'In one of the entr'actes we were given some refreshments and General Zhukov, well known as the organizer of the defence of Moscow, came and joined us. The play ended about 1.45 am. We were just about four hours more tired. We looked forward to going back to our train where we were warm and comfortable. Not a bit of it. The local authorities had arranged to put us all up in a modern, warm, well-lighted building, which I think must have been the headquarters of some local authority.

'We arrived there about 2 am, very anxious to go to bed. About twenty to thirty beds had been brought in the previous twenty-four hours with new mattresses, blankets, sheets and pillows, and distributed in the various offices. There were no washing facilities except one cold trickle on the top floor. Next morning I discovered some wash-basins downstairs next door to the kitchen.

'Unfortunately, either because they wanted to keep the place in which we were sleeping secret, or because somebody had forgotten to see about it, no one arranged for our luggage to be brought from the station. Three Polish officers, including a Colonel, sat on the station platform from 9.30 pm to 2 am waiting to be told where to take the luggage. In consequence we could not get to bed until it had arrived. While waiting for the luggage and talking to Sikorski, I opened the door of the next room. There I saw a banquet prepared for fifty-two people. The table was laden with sucking-pig, chicken, duck, etc., and every wine from vodka to champagne.

'When I told Sikorski about this he just exclaimed with more sorrow in his voice than anger, "I just can't make any more speeches or attend any more banquets today. I must, and will, go to bed." It appeared the luggage had still not arrived so we went and nibbled a little bit of food.

'At 3 am our luggage arrived and a few of us went to bed. At 3.15 General Zhukov and about forty Russians turned up and indulged in a banquet until half-past five in the morning. Our sleep was punctuated by sounds of toasts which went on for over two hours.

'We left at nine o'clock the next morning for the aerodrome to fly back to Astrakhan on our first stage home.

'The impression that remains most vivid in my mind out of all this kaleidoscopic series of adventures is the picture of the Poles in Russia.

'Thousands of them, men, women, and children, very little food, inadequate clothing, tents as their sole habitation; all living in the freezing temperatures, separated from their homes for over two years – yet in spite of all this, smiling, laughing, singing. It only goes to show that when the cause is good enough and the heart of man is in the right place, the spirit can overcome every material discomfort and trial.'

7

When Retinger came back from Russia with several pounds of caviar, and a few bottles of vodka, he threw a party for his English friends, including Hugh Dalton and Ben Smith, both of whom were in the Government. The party was an echo of the Russian banquets and had similar results.

Retinger loved to entertain. In wartime London little of it was possible at home. Most had to be done outside. Retinger, who felt nowhere more at home than behind a table with a glass in front of him, was well known to all the head waiters and barmen in the best haunts of London.

He lived in a succession of furnished flats which were easy to find in those days. They were usually sufficiently large to put up his numerous Polish friends who dropped in on him when passing through town. For all of them he kept open house and a bottle or two could always be found. His nephew, Witek Retinger, a distinguished fighter pilot was mostly stationed near London. Many a thirsty pilot found his way to Uncle Retinger who loved the hurly-burly, bohemian, care-free atmosphere and the young company.

He was meeting many new people and cementing old friendships. Interspersed through different notes of his, there are a number of reminiscences of people who played a part in his political life:

> 'Averell Harriman is without doubt an exceptionally handsome man. He is not unlike Anthony Eden, but nobody would dub him a "glamour boy".
>
> 'I first met him when he came to London in connection with the Lend-Lease Act. He had an extraordinarily good understanding of international politics, and he knew Poland well, being the largest shareholder in the copper mines and because, before the War, he had put forward a plan for the electrification of Poland in order to experiment in a smaller country before applying it in America. His proposals were unfortunately turned down by the Government because of stupid propaganda equating foreign investments with foreign exploitation. I didn't know Harriman then, but I thought his proposals were of enormous importance to Poland, and knowing the opposition to it, I went to see Mr Bartel, the Prime Minister. He was of the same opinion but said that unfortunately we were the only two

men in favour of it. The reaction against it was so great that no one would be able to do anything about it. And this proved to be the case.

'Harriman, who entered politics comparatively late in life, in support of his hero Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, had a direct way of treating problems, judging them on their inner merits, not on their superficial aspects. I saw a good deal of him when he became head of the Economic Co-operation Administration and I admired the candid way in which he talked to his opposite numbers in Europe.

'I met Adolf Berle Jr in March 1942 when I went to the States. Once, while Sikorski was attending some official party, I had my first lunch and long conversation with Berle, who at that time was President Roosevelt's right-hand man, and who I had been instructed to ask for financial help for the Polish underground movement. I put all my arguments before him, telling him that we had about twenty-five tons of gold which we did not want to touch, so that we could take it back to Poland, that we were not receiving sufficient aid from the British Government and that we needed help to develop our underground organization. Berle accepted the arguments and decided on the spot that he would do his best to get assistance from the President. He promised to let me know definitely at four o'clock in the afternoon. Promptly at four the telephone rang and Berle said: "I have twelve million dollars yearly for you for the duration." Whenever I needed advice on difficult matters I always got it from him, and whenever I needed help in furthering my ideas he never failed to give it, if he thought that I was right. We became very good friends and I admired him very much.

'The most typical American I knew, although he has lived most of his life in Europe, was Anthony Drexel Biddle. Biddle, for whom the American expression "trouble shooter" might have been invented, began his diplomatic career as Minister to Norway and was later sent to Warsaw as Ambassador. While in Poland he proved to be a very good contact man and a skilled diplomat in difficult situations. After the German invasion he accompanied the Polish Government to Paris and London, and an impressive number of Poles spoke with gratitude of the help he personally gave them during their flight from Poland. His generous heart always responded to any genuine need, although he was enough of an American to find out when the need was not so genuine. When he left Poland he

explained to the State Department the reasons for the change of President and Prime Minister, and thanks to his lucid intervention there was never any doubt or hesitation on the part of the State Department in recognizing the Polish Government in Paris. While Ambassador to the Polish Government during the War, he was also appointed Ambassador to all the other European Governments in London. At the end of the War Tony Biddle went into military service and was in charge of displaced persons. Again he did this job extremely well. Finally, when Eisenhower became NATO's Supreme Commander, Biddle was appointed Deputy Chief of Staff to deal with relations with member countries. I will add here a sequence to the conversations I had with Adolf Berle and the help he gave to the Polish underground movement. About a fortnight after we left America, one day Biddle came into my office with a large suitcase. "Come with me to General Sikorski," he said. Then, showing me the suitcase, he added: "I have here two million dollars for you."

'John Foster Dulles and Sir Stafford Cripps were two men with similar backgrounds, but to my mind the Britisher looms far bigger than his American counterpart. Stafford was a friend of mine of some thirty years standing and it may have prejudiced my opinion of him, but I believe the following judgement to be true. The basic motive of both men's activities was religious and moral. I think Dulles was religious from a sense of duty, more or less in the same way as the Pilgrim Fathers and their descendants, who went single-mindedly to the defence of their narrow religion out of fear of Hell. Dulles was a civilised revivalist, but conscientious, and he tried to be impartial.

'Cripps' religious inspiration was more orthodox; he believed in the love of God, and the necessity of Goodness. Cripps was certainly a mystic, and the ethical side of his character was merely a result of his mysticism, while Dulles was almost entirely concerned with ethics. He believed more in morality than in God. He was undoubtedly as sincere as Cripps, but, being fantically minded, he would use means which, if ever used – and perhaps they were once – by Cripps, would have made him suffer. For Dulles I believe that the end sanctified the means; for Cripps the means were as sacred as his goal.

'I met Dulles for the first time late in 1940, when he began his first fact-finding visit to Europe. At that time Poland was still one of the most important military allies of Great Britain, and her occupation by Germany and Russia was one of the salient facts of the year. It was natural that an American politician who was starting on his international career should wish to know about my country. I scarcely knew anything about Dulles and I was both pleasantly surprised and grateful for the intelligent way in which he put his questions, and the general knowledge he showed of the politics and history of Europe, including Poland. The first time I went to see him in his downtown office in New York, it was the office itself that surprised me. I saw a duplex apartment teeming with partners and clerks, spacious, beautifully furnished rooms, many lovely paintings, and in one room there was John Foster and his brother Allen. And what a difference between them! John Foster looked like a clergyman, or rather a Catholic prelate, vivid and somewhat nervous. Allen gave the impression of being what he was, namely a very successful lawyer; quiet, relaxed, but at the same time hard-working. They were both extremely intelligent. The only physical attribute they had in common was the benign expression in their eyes. I thought that Allen relied on his brains, and John Foster on his faith. I don't know how they worked, but I formed the impression that John Foster conceived an idea and had it carried out by his experts, while Allen worked on an idea given to him by others. Allen thoroughly understood the art of publicity, but exercised his gift only for professional or public ends; John Foster, who was more of a politician, knew how to take advantage of it. But neither of them was a publicity seeker. Allen was certainly more broadminded than his brother and that is why his contacts with people were so much easier. I think Allen was loved by the men who worked with him, while John Foster was respected.

'In my endeavour to promote the idea of the unity of Europe I found whole-hearted support from Sir Stafford Cripps, one of the greatest men of his generation. With the exception of Dr Marion Phillips who, alas, died before I could start real work on the idea so dear to my heart, it was with Stafford Cripps that I used to talk most often in England about it. Before the War I had many conversations with him and Isobel Cripps round a table in a restaurant – nearly always a vegetarian one, unfortunately! – on the subject of the unity of Europe. Obviously, the generous mind of Cripps accepted this idea with the greatest enthusiasm, but being a lawyer with a practical mind, he did not confine himself, as did Beveridge, to Utopian dreams of a world government, but showed more interest in the economic unity of Europe, although perhaps formulating too rigid ideas on policy. Later, when he was British Ambassador to Russia, Cripps started to write a book on the unity of Europe and when I left Moscow for the first time in 1941 I brought part of the manuscript back with me to England. Unhappily the book was never finished, for when Cripps came back and joined Churchill's government as Leader of the House, he had neither the time nor the inclination to continue the work. He felt that, playing an active part in the Government, he had no right to publish his own ideas on the subject.

'In Moscow a friendship was formed between Milovan Gavrilovic, the Yugoslav Ambassador, Sir Stafford Cripps and Panayotis Pipinelis, who was then the Greek Ambassador. They were called The Three Musketeers. As they were all interested in broad ideas and long-term policies, they soon began to exchange views.

'When I met him in Moscow, Gavrilovic was a man in late middle-age, slow of speech and gesture until he became excited; reflective, willing to take initiatives and a great patriot. I was not sure, however, whether he was a Yugoslav patriot or only a Serbian one. He was a leader of the Peasant Party, convinced that farming was the most important industry of his country and the agricultural population the most important element. He was certainly most eager to accept some kind of real co-operation, not only among the Balkan peoples, but also in the rest of Europe. He knew then, of course, and realised still more after leaving Moscow, how difficult it was for a country like his own to be totally independent.

'Pipinelis, who was younger and had an infinitely greater knowledge of international affairs, was of the school of diplomatists which probably goes back in Greece as far as the Byzantine Empire. Just as Gavrilovic was interested in broad political and economic ideas, so Pipinelis paid attention to psychological reactions. But Pipinelis, Civil Servant as he was, was less concerned with internal politics than Gavrilovic. His interest lay rather in making internal politics compatible with foreign policy, which in his opinion was more important. He suggested to me many moves, which were almost always profitable, and prevented me from making some tactical mistakes.

'I must say that all those with whom I discussed the unity of Europe strongly agreed that the federation of Europe must be based on the consent of the people, and not merely on governmental agreements, and without defining it, or ever using the word, we all agreed on the necessity for a supra-national authority.'

8

In all of Retinger's accounts of that period there is little mention of France. Indeed the French seem to have played little part in all the consultations between the exiled Governments. Was it because General de Gaulle and his Committee were out of sympathy with the ideas Retinger was trying to promote? More likely the proud General felt the awkwardness of his position. Although he spoke for France, until June 1944 he was only the leader of a national committee, while all the other countries had recognized governments. This led to seemingly minor, but in fact significant, squabbles. When one day at an official function de Gaulle saw Sikorski seated, as Prime Minister, higher than himself, he turned round and left. Perhaps because in certain less endearing facets of their character they were so much alike, these two great leaders had little sympathy for one another.

A civilian by status and conviction, Retinger took no part in Sikorski's military activities. But he was always at his side when he was concerned with foreign diplomacy. He accompanied Sikorski on his trips to the United States, one of which included Mexico, which pleased him immensely.

Early in 1942, shortly after their return from Russia, clouds began to gather on the Eastern sky. Reports arriving from the Soviet Union spoke of growing difficulties. Even at the time of the Moscow visit it became apparent that it would not be possible to equip all of Anders' army, nor feed and clothe the families of the soldiers. There were of course severe shortages inside Russia. Early in 1942 it also became clear that the Soviet authorities wished to restrict the size of the Army and so Sikorski and Stalin agreed that it should be evacuated to Persia, which was then under the joint occupation of Soviet and British troops, and where supplies were easier and the climate warmer. It also became more difficult to provide assistance for the hundreds of thousands of deported Poles and to extricate those who were known to be in jails and labour camps. Moreover, several thousands of officers and NCOs who had been captured by the Soviet Armies in 1939 could not be traced. The refusal, or inability, of the Soviet authorities to provide any information as to their whereabouts gave rise to suspicion. But other problems were

even more ominous for the future. There was the unresolved question of the frontiers. There were also signs that the USSR, who began to recruit and organize its own supporters, was making ready to have a say in Polish internal affairs.

Politics reflected the fortunes of the War. Hitler's attack on Russia was a godsend for Britain. Nothing illustrates it better than this short vignette in one of Retinger's notes:

> 'I heard a story in the Middle East which I thought the funniest of all. A Rabbi asked God how the War was going to end. God answered "Either in a natural or in a supernatural way. The natural would be if I were to send down to earth a host of angels to wipe out the Germans. The supernatural way would be if the English beat the Germans!" When I came back from the Middle East I went with General Sikorski to Chequers to see Winston Churchill, and on the way I told him that I was going to repeat the story to the Prime Minister. Sikorski warned me not to do so, saying he did not know how Churchill would take it. Anyway, I did tell the story to Churchill who laughed like a schoolboy and repeated it to all his friends, to such an extent that it got into the papers. I also told it to Anthony Eden but he did not think it funny.'

With Hitler's attack on Russia in June 1941, Britain's prospects improved, but at the same time Russia's chances were not good. Stalin knew how desperately his country needed British and American aid, but he also knew how much Churchill and Roosevelt were afraid that he might strike another bargain with Hitler. Both sides were mutually dependent and both had means of putting pressure on one another. Stalin, who played his cards closer to his chest, proved better at that game. His unreasonable demands for the immediate opening of a Second Front were of considerable embarrassment to the Allies whose inability to do anything about it enhanced their feeling of indebtedness to Russia. This was further increased by their reversals, in the first part of 1942, in the Desert, in the Far East and in the battle for the Atlantic. Consequently there was a marked increase of sympathy for Russian claims at the expense of Poland. Poles began to feel increasingly pressed upon. On 1 August 1942 a leader in *The Times* proposed a division of Europe into an Eastern and Western sphere of interests and included Poland in the former. Similar opinions were frequently heard. As a result Sikorski's Government was faced with growing internal difficulties. The Poles began to be faced with the dilemma: can Stalin be trusted? Is his friendship worth the price? Is there a limit to his demands or will they increase as his fortunes improve? Alternatively, if there is nothing to be gained, would it not be better to dig in and fight it out even if that means another defeat? In any event what will be the attitude of Britain and America? How far will they support their Polish ally? How far will they let Communist Russia sway the destinies of Eastern and Central Europe?

From the middle of 1942 the Poles, collectively and individually, began to be torn between these two alternatives – between an attitude of hope and one of despair. All internal squabbles, all the internal manoeuvres reflected the agonizing dilemma which was in the mind of every single individual whatever his party politics might be. While Sikorski stood firm in defence of the essential interests of the country, he genuinely tried to reach an honest and lasting understanding with the Russians. Throughout 1942 he stuck to this line and carried the Government with him.

Suddenly the Germans made a bombshell announcement in April 1943. Near Smolensk, in the forest of Katyn, mass graves of nearly ten thousand Polish officers and NCOs were discovered. Shot in 1940, many still bore identification marks. Everything tallied and there could be no doubt. Three camps were known to have been in the area. The names of many of the inmates were known. Those were the missing men whom Sikorski and Anders were vainly trying to locate and about whom the Soviet authorities had refused all information. The Germans claimed they were shot and buried by the Soviets before they captured the place themselves. The Poles knew it was true.

The Polish Government in London went through a spasm of agony. A couple of days later it issued a communiqué announcing that it asked for an independent inquiry by the International Red Cross. Stalin immediately accused the Poles of falling for German propaganda and broke off diplomatic relations. Churchill and Roosevelt intervened, and while the Poles retracted the Russians did not. From that moment onward the USSR ceased to recognize the exiled Government in London. Shortly afterwards a Polish National Committee was formed in Russia and a year later it was to assume power in the wake of the advancing Soviet armies.

What could have been the motives for this criminal folly? Imprisonment, death sentences without trial and mass deportation to labour camps under inhuman conditions were normal occurrences of Stalin's régime, but mass shooting of prisoners was an unprecedented act. Stalin must have known. But was it a deliberate act to kill part of the Polish intelligentsia which might oppose the subsequent spread of communism in Poland? Did he measure its consequences? Could he really hope it would never be discovered? Was he conscious of his crime when he spoke to Sikorski in Moscow in December 1941? Reading the minutes of conversations and records of the visit his duplicity is sometimes hard to believe. None of the Poles who were there at the time were biased or naive. And yet they all believed Stalin was sincere in what he said.

One is tempted to think that if the Katyn murders had not taken place Stalin would certainly not have had, and conceivably would not have wished, to act towards the Poles as he did. As it was, he was inexorably driven by the logic of his deed. The chance of a true reconciliation such as Sikorski and Retinger wished for was compromised for decades. Perhaps Stalin failed to feel it that way – perhaps he never felt anything – after all it was a matter between two kindred nations, neither of which was his by birth. However, from that moment onwards the situation for Poland became critical. It was obvious what the future had in store. More than ever it was necessary to close ranks and make use of all available assets. In the Allied war effort the Poles played their full part and earned a good deal of sympathy and goodwill. The personal prestige of Sikorski was very great and there grew around his person an extremely valuable web of personal loyalties on the part of Western leaders.

In preparation for a diplomatic offensive Sikorski took off on an inspection tour of the Polish Forces in the Middle East. On his return, taking off from Gibraltar in the evening of 3 July 1943, his plane crashed and all the passengers were killed. No greater blow could have befallen the Poles.

Since the object of the trip was essentially military, Retinger did not take part. In his notes he left this brief, factual record of what happened when the news arrived:

> 'On the morning of 4 July I was waiting at Swindon airport for the plane bringing General Sikorski back from an inspection of the Polish troops in the Middle East when the Commander of the airport

told me that General Sikorski's plane had crashed at Gibraltar, and the General and his companions, including his daughter, Zosia Lesniowska, had been killed. I asked for a plane to take me back to London, as I was anxious to leave for Gibraltar as soon as possible (I left in fact about 5 am the following day). On my arrival in London I found a message from the Prime Minister asking me to call on him at midnight, after a Cabinet meeting. I was ushered into the big room at 10 Downing Street which had just been vacated by the Cabinet, and which was dense with smoke. I found the Prime Minister alone, wearing his light blue siren suit. As soon as he saw me he got up and started to cry. He told me that he had loved General Sikorski as a younger brother, and had watched his career not only with interest, but with affection. He was profoundly moved and shocked by the news of the crash, and deplored the fact that he would not be able to co-operate with General Sikorski when peace came. He went on to recall with emotion the many critical days they had spent together.

'We then discussed the political situation of the Poles after General Sikorski's death. He asked me who I expected would be the General's successor as Prime Minister. I replied that it was too early for me to make any prediction: I could only tell him that General Sikorski had been grooming Mr Mikolajczyk for the post, and that whenever General Sikorski had referred to this he had always added: "Not for a long time, of course."

'Churchill could not remember Mikolajczyk, but when I described him he said: "The man who looks like a fat, slightly bald, old fox?" He then asked who would be our Commander-in-Chief. I replied that I hoped it would not be General Sosnkowski, and Churchill said at once: "I don't like him, but of course I would never dream of interfering in your politics."

'However, his attitude towards General Sikorski's successor was quite different. He did not treat Mr Mikolajczyk with the courtesy which one would have expected. He showed little sympathy for his feelings, or understanding of his lack of international experience. He acted like a kind of steam-roller, hating any obstacle on his path and trying by sheer force of personality to crush anything which stood in the way of his own wishes and views on Polish-Russian relations. He felt that he owed nothing to Mikolajczyk. The words he had uttered to General Sikorski in 1940 did not seem to apply to his relationship with the General's successor.

'Later Winston Churchill's part in the recognition of the Soviet-sponsored Polish Government by the major Powers certainly affected the future not only of Poland, but of Eastern Europe as a whole, and here, I would like to remind readers of the conversation between General Sikorski and Mr Churchill on 19 June 1940.'

PART FOUR
Into Occupied Poland

SIKORSKI's death was a cruel blow to Retinger. He had lost not only an intimate friend to whom he had been loyal and devoted, but also the man with whom and through whom he would carry out his ideas and plans. He sought nothing for himself, but confident in Sikorski's friendship and support, laid all credit at his feet.

With Mikolajczyk, Sikorski's successor, things were not the same. The relations were good but no more, and in any case the new Premier bore no comparison to the old one. The quality of his leadership was of a different order.

One day, towards the end of 1943, they discussed the difficulties of the situation. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin had just met in Teheran and the Poles felt they were in the dock. Soviet troops were approaching Polish borders. Among them were Polish troops formed independently of the Government in London, and behind came the communist-controlled Polish National Committee. What were the feelings of the leaders of the Underground in Poland? What attitude did the country wish to take? Was the London Government really in tune with the people in Poland? It had the support of the Western Allies but it had no diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. It still had many cards to play, but to play them correctly it needed to know what the people inside the country felt and thought. Also the Underground leaders ought to know the true position of the Government in London, and what support it could count upon from its allies.

By reason of their exile, the London leaders considered themselves largely a caretaker Government. They assumed the destiny of the State but tried to avoid impinging upon the right of the country to decide its fate in accordance with democratic principles once freedom was restored. But now great pressures were being put upon them. There were the territorial demands of the Soviet Union balanced by their offer of compensation in the West at Germany's expense. More important, however, was the looming threat to the independence and internal freedom of the country. It was essential that the Government and the country should act in harmony.

For over four years the Polish leaders in London had been separated from those in Poland. Wireless messages were their main method of communication. Apart from a few young parachutists and couriers there was no personal contact. 'If only one of us could go and discuss things on the spot,' exclaimed Mikolajczyk. Retinger pounced on the idea. He was ready to go. He was the best placed person to do so; he had been at the centre of things and knew everything and everybody. Mikolajczyk was taken aback. At his age – he was nearly 57 at the time – to take a risk which few young men dared take, was a foolhardy thing to suggest. Besides, how would he get back? He strongly advised against it. But Retinger persisted.

He went to see his good friend General Colin Gubbins, who was the head of the SOE, the mysterious and highly efficient organization assisting or organizing resistance movements throughout occupied Europe. Only he could arrange it, and General Gubbins agreed. He would be parachuted in and brought back by plane. Half of Italy was already under Allied control and the southern Italian airports were just near enough for a light plane to attempt a landing in Poland and return the same night. Although there was no precedent for it, by the time Retinger was due to return such a landing could be arranged. But secrecy was essential – and not only because of the Gestapo. Among some officers, at headquarters, in the intelligence departments and elsewhere, there were signs of plots. Gripped by a feeling of despair, many thought the country was being sold. Accusations of treachery were being bandied about. Some of them were directed against those who were associated with the policy of seeking agreement with the Russians. Retinger was one of them and therefore special precautions had to be taken. Later events proved that these were unfortunately justified.

By mid-January 1944 Retinger was in Bari, in Italy, ready for the jump. But the weather was bad and the operation was postponed from week to week. From there he wrote two letters; to the Prime Minister and to the President of Poland. I shall quote them both.

'Bari, 31 January 1944

'To President Raczkiewicz.

'I am extremely sorry that I could not take leave of you before going to Poland, hear your instructions and benefit from your valuable advice. The British, however, who organized my trip, categorically requested that nobody should know about it apart from the Prime Minister.

'The reasons for my going to Poland were the following:

1. I considered it essential that in addition to young agents an older person well versed in all Governmental policies, towards Germany, towards Russia, as well as towards the Allies, should go to Poland. I believed myself to be the most suitable person for this task since I was the close collaborator of General Sikorski and of Premier Mikolajczyk and since I was in close touch with all the leading Polish personalities abroad, as well as with you, Mr President, who have always been well-intentioned towards me. My trips to America, Russia and the Middle East have enabled me to gather a great deal of information which can be of value to our compatriots in Poland.

2. I also considered that as a person who, during the whole period of the War, has never concerned himself with internal political questions, I can be impartial in my talks.

3. I thought moreover that since many of our allies have confidence in me, the story I shall be able to tell on my return can be of great importance in these extremely difficult times.

4. In addition I believed that an appropriate use of my trip, from the propaganda point of view (about which the Prime Minister can give you details), can have a beneficial effect on the morale of the people in Poland, as well as hit the Germans, since it will prove the existence of a direct contact between the Government and the country.

'I suppose that the Premier will discuss with you my mission to Poland. I am convinced it will fully coincide with the aims of Polish policy, which I have heard expounded by you in the course of our conversations since the death of General Sikorski.

'Above all else, I believe that my trip will emphasize the unity of all Poles on all important issues in these difficult times, and will underline their cohesion in the face of the enemy, as well as in our relations with the Western Allies.

'I hope that I shall be back in some six weeks time, that I shall be able to give comfort in Poland and that God will help me to fulfill my mission, honestly, usefully and with dignity.

'Before departing, I take the liberty of wishing you, Mr President, good health and success in your difficult and unselfish task. May God guide you and bless your work.

'Should anything happen to me, please take care of my daughters.

'Bari, 1 February 1944

'To Premier Mikolajczyk.

'It seems I shall be leaving soon. I therefore write to take leave and I hope that God will bless you in your difficult task and in the tribulations that await you. It might be that all our hopes will be betrayed in this war and that the peace negotiations will go against us. That is why, as your predecessor General Sikorski did in 1940, so must we now gather all our strength in order to set an example which future generations can imitate and learn from.

'First of all, therefore, we must be united and our national unity and discipline must be our principal aim and weapon. So far we have stood out very well to the outside world and have not let ourselves be drawn too far in our internal squabbles and intrigues. We should keep up this attitude.

'And our second commandment must be complete patriotic and political honesty. We should not seek to defend ourselves by "tricks", providing only short-term relief, but which can turn against us and which, moreover, will set a bad example for future generations. Only a big power, solidly based, can afford "tricks" – in which case it could well dispense with them – while we must earn our future only by honesty, self-sacrifice and let us say it, virtue.

'Our surest weapon must be a steadfast patriotism, which appreciates the importance and the worth of an honest compromise. We lost to Russia but Russia is winning the War for the Allies. History might change this pattern but we have not the power to do anything about it. Therefore only an honest compromise can help us along the hard road of history. But it must take patriotism into account and cannot go too far. We must not forget that this compromise must be an honest one. It must be acceptable to the majority of Poles, it must be a lasting one and it must lead to some kind of co-operation – only a voluntarily accepted one – with Russia, whether it is communist or not. The megalomania of "national honour" did us much harm and we cannot sacrifice to it any more.

'I shall be trying to promote in Poland all the ideas which I discussed with you and I trust that I may have some measure of success. In case, however, something were to happen to me, I wish to remind you again that you should consider me expendable. You should not attempt to rescue me; only exploit me for the good of the Polish

cause. I should add that you might have complete confidence in me and my activities. I have no personal ambitions and I am too old to be drawn back from my mission by personal considerations. I only desire good for my country and peace in that part of Europe where Poland is.

'As you know, I have not taken part in any personal intrigues and during the War have kept far away from any internal political manoeuvres. I have therefore no reason to depart from my path, nor shall I.

'Should anything happen to me, please remember my daughters who remain in England. I enclose a letter to the President. Please hand it over to him whenever you think appropriate.

'May God keep you in his care.'

2

Embarking on a trip against enormous odds, these two letters to President Raczkiewicz and Premier Mikolajczyk were something of a testament. What happened later is described by Retinger as follows:

> 'The car pulled up at the peremptory behest of the British road patrol. Our soldier-driver showed his identity card and, though he had no real idea of who or what we were, he evidently realised that his passengers were not at all what they seemed, and managed to convince the NCO in command of the patrol that we were officers from his unit "on most urgent and important work". It was a good thing for us that he did, because here we were, at night, not far from the front, in civilian clothes with military coats drawn over them and with nothing but false German papers in our pockets. I should have liked to see the NCO's face if we had had to produce those!
>
> 'This was the third time we had been ready to go. We had been all dressed up and on the point of getting into the plane when the flight was called off owing to news of a violent storm having started somewhere on the route to Poland. There had been nothing to do but return to that rather dreary Italian town, Bari, sixty miles away, where we were quartered. In the disgust of our disappointment we had thrown off our parachute clothing, leaving in our haste our Polish–British identity cards behind us and then, for the first and last time while in Italy, had been stopped by an Allied patrol.
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> 'I had already been several weeks in Italy waiting for propitious

weather. For reasons of personal security it had been thought necessary to keep me in a small town incommunicado, unable to see or be seen. I had practically nothing to do the live-long day, until my British friends took pity on me and gave me a few books. It was the usual haphazard collection of thrillers, detective and love stories, but among them was Jowett's wonderful translation of Plato's dialogues and, casting love and detection aside, I settled down to re-read Plato.

'I felt a certain affinity with Socrates, whose life, after all, was politics and death, for my life had for a long time been politics, and death and I had had a nodding acquaintance for these many years past. However, I flattered myself that I was past the Greek philosopher's rather pompous remark, that "He (the vulgar) seeks to convince the hearer that what he says is true. I am rather seeking to convince myself; to convince my hearer is a secondary matter to me."

'In the very first conversation I had with Sikorski after he was appointed Prime Minister in October 1939, it was decided that Polish policy must be based on perfect honesty, in regard both to Polish internal conditions and to our international relations. This was not only because "honesty is the best policy", but also because Poland represented moral values in the world, those ideals for which the youth of Great Britain and America, grimly this time, had gone to war and of which so little is now heard. Besides, we had no reason to hide the truth. The exploits of our fighting men, the resistance of our countrymen in Poland, had to be backed and matched by honesty in the dealings of the government responsible for the destinies of our country. Regardless of political conditions, international or domestic, it was decided that honesty in words and deeds should be the hallmark of our policy. This, incidentally, was the reason why Sikorski did not hesitate in 1941 to initiate the negotiations with the Soviet Government, which resulted in the signing of an agreement on 30 July 1941.

'In 1944, after Sikorski's death, although much had changed, we were still completely convinced that we were right, but the time had come when someone who was in constant touch with the actual handling of our main affairs had to go to Poland to acquaint our countrymen with the facts, to tell them what we were doing and had done, to let them see our problems in the perspective of the free, democratic atmosphere of London. This someone had to know everything, people, facts and tendencies, but, waiting idly there in Bari I almost began to question whether it really had to be me. After all, to venture in this way into German-occupied Poland was not an attractive undertaking for a person past middle-age and one who, anyway, had always abhorred physical exertion. Thus I doubted, until Socrates came to my rescue and pointed out that "a good man ought not to calculate the chances of living or dying, he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong".

'There was only one answer to that question: I was doing right. We were right and the principles we had laid down were right, and I must go on to Poland to inform our leaders there of the whole history of our dealings in London, and explain to them that we were right to avoid the temptation to trim our sails according to changing external conditions.

'During the latter part of those long weeks of waiting I was joined by Marek Celt who was to accompany me on my trip to Warsaw. Two years before he had jumped into Poland, and during the few months he had spent there he had become well acquainted with the life and conditions of the Underground Movement. It was an absorbing story he had to tell.

'We finally took off on 3 April 1944. There was still an hour of daylight, and had we gone directly for our goal we would have been well over the German lines, but the plane made straight for the sea.

'It was still just light enough to see through the clouds, the hilly coast of Dalmatia when we crossed it somewhere near Split. Then with the darkness boredom settled upon us; the initial excitement was over and the crucial moment of our adventure was still many hours distant.

'The plane was British, but the crew Polish, one of them a young volunteer from the Argentine who had left Poland at the age of ten and was deadly keen to see it again. The nearer came the dreaded moment of the jump, the lower sank my heart, and the more intolerable grew his complaints at the unfairness of Fate, which allowed us to jump into Poland (as if we wanted to at that moment!), while he would have to turn round and fly back.

'When waiting for a vital moment all talk is rather hollow, and it was a relief when one of the crew said: "Look! There's the Danube." And there it was, a whitish worm squirming between two strips of dark green forest. A few minutes later we saw the lights of Budapest – real lights with no nonsense about black-out, and most attractive. But Budapest was not for us. It appeared that considerable respect was owed to its protective ring of anti-aircraft guns, and at some distance we skirted the city. From my companion's face I could see that he, too, was deeply interested in Budapest, but I didn't know why until he said quietly: "My fiancée's down there."

'Some twenty minutes later we reached the Tatras, now flooded with moonlight, and it seemed to me that I had never seen anything so beautiful as the peak of the Gerlach mountain and the Chocholowska valley.

'Within a few minutes we saw the lights of Zakopane, the most famous playground of Poland. Some parts of the adjoining lands were for a long time the subject of dispute between the Poles of Galicia and Hungary, which until the Versailles Treaty had been our neighbour in this part of the country. My guardian, Count Zamoyski, was a large landowner in the area and my father who was his lawyer succeeded in reaching a settlement, getting back for Poland these disputed areas. This happened in the year I was born. That the first place in Poland I saw was Zakopane I took as a most propitious omen.

'Soon after, I spotted Czorsztyn, the small town in which my daughter had been brought up. Now we were approaching our pin-point and the jump, the most anxious moment of the flight. As a man past middle-age I had refused to make a trial jump in England. I had consulted the medical officer and had embroiled him with my instructor, putting to them the argument that there were only three possibilities: either nothing happens to me when I jump, in which case why go through it twice? Or I break my neck – and it does not matter to me if I break it in England or Poland. Or else I break my leg, and this I prefer to do in Poland, where I would at least have the opportunity of fulfilling my mission.

'Both my instructor and the doctor saw the point, and so I only had theoretical training. I must confess that I have seldom felt so proud as when the medical officer told me that, as far as he knew, I would be, by some years, the oldest parachutist in the world.

'While in Italy, for reasons of personal security my presence had been hedged about with the greatest secrecy, to the point where it was even thought necessary to prevent my recognition by any of the

air force personnel. The adjutant of the Polish Squadron stationed in Bari was my own nephew, while many of the other Polish airmen there knew me personally. Thus, before we got to the airfield I was given an awful looking mask and while waiting for my plane all the youngsters from the Polish and British squadrons stared at me as if I were some kind of carnival monster. Anyway, as far as my personal security went, all this secrecy and masquerading did not help very much, because soon after my arrival in Warsaw the Gestapo knew of my presence there.

'As soon as my plane took off I discarded my mask. Shortly afterwards the seventy pounds of my parachute clothes began to weigh too heavily, and to the disgust of the dispatcher, I discarded them as well. And so the last half-hour of the flight was occupied with redonning my parachute togs, which required the united efforts of myself, my companion, and two or three members of the impatient crew. However, at last I was dressed, and the signal came that we were approaching the pin-point where we were to be dropped. The hole in the floor of the plane was opened, containers to be thrown out ahead of us were placed in front of me, and I sat waiting for the drop.

'In the darkness I could see nothing but a spot of moonlight which, percolating through a porthole, cast a silver disc on the floor. Suddenly it began to sweep swiftly away and then dart rapidly all over the plane. A German fighter had appeared in the vicinity, and our aircraft was obliged to take evasive action. The mad oscillations of the moonlight seemed to last for ages. Finally it was decided that we had thrown off the fighter and could continue towards our rendezvous.

'A few minutes later the lights of the reception committee had been picked up, and we began to circle. The twenty-two containers were thrown out. I tried to approach the hole in the way I had been told by Sergeant Simmons, my instructor, but the dispatcher took fright and, grabbing my arm, shouted to me not to go too near or I would fall out! This caused a heated argument, which probably prevented me from thinking about the actual jump and saved me from having that horrid sensation in the pit of the stomach.

'Suddenly I saw the signal, which meant that it was time for me to jump. Remembering Sergeant Simmons I tried to execute all the movements which he had so carefully taught me; I gave my feet a violent upward jerk, at the same time pushing my head back, and I was out of the plane. Within a second or so I felt the canopy expanding; a slight jerk, I grabbed the forward lines above my head and drew my feet up in accordance with instructions, and found myself dropping gently. In a few seconds I saw at about two hundred yards the lights of the reception committee. I touched the ground and let myself fall. The parachute billowed down over me.

'As I slowly unbelted my harness some of the boys came running towards me. They were excited and moved, literally, to tears. They had been expecting us every night for four weeks, and this was the first time they had had the good luck to receive Poles from England, or, indeed, any kind of material proof of collaboration with the West. In a few minutes I saw my companion Celt. Coming down he had struck a tree and was a bit bruised, but laughed when I said: "Now I can confess that I am night-blind, and cannot see at all in the dark!"

'The first thing that struck me was the great efficiency of the reception committee. It was composed of two or three score young men, soldiers of the Polish Underground Army, who for the sake of security were drawn from villages some ten or fifteen miles distant. They were between eighteen and twenty-five years of age, dressed – for it was still fairly cold – in long sheepskin coats, which had mostly been looted from the Germans, and were armed with a few machine-guns, automatic pistols, and a dozen or so rifles. Many of them had revolvers, but about fifteen had no arms whatsoever. They were led by two officers and one civilian, a delegate of the Underground authorities in Warsaw. The twenty-two containers which had been dropped with us were all collected, and within half-an-hour were well on the way to their secret hiding places.

'I soon found that the whole Underground organization was amazingly efficient and well-run. Its staff work was really excellent, despite the appalling difficulties under which they worked. The radio contacts with Britain were quite good, notwithstanding the many risks involved on the Polish side. During my stay in Poland several teams of wireless operators were caught and, after being tortured, put to death by the Germans. Many of their leaders were boys previously trained in England and Celt, my companion, had himself been responsible for sending several of them over.

'The great obstacle to regular air communications between the British-occupied territories and Poland were in the main due to weather conditions. Bad weather was our greatest enemy. I had been obliged to wait for eleven weeks before my flight to Poland, while during that winter of 1943–4, air communications with Poland were interrupted from November to April. The minimum distance between the pin-points in Poland and the nearest British airfields was twelve hundred miles, and the landing of our planes in Poland can well be considered the most sporting aerial feat of the war. The planes had to fly there and back unarmed and without any escort; and they had to seek out a tiny spot only a few hundred yards square, illuminated only by the light of stable lamps. Owing to the vigilance of the Germans it was practically impossible to do more than cover up ditches superficially, or smooth out bumps and remove obstacles, therefore the actual landings and take-off were extremely difficult for planes which were necessarily heavily laden with all the petrol needed for such a very long flight. Lastly, the navigators could only be given maps dating from 1939, or even earlier, which did not show the variety of changes which had since occurred in the topography of the country mainly as a result of war operations.

'Relieved of our harness and heavy parachute clothes we walked to a small house some three miles distant, where an elderly couple received us. They, too, had been waiting up for us every night for the last four weeks. We could not, of course, tell them who we were, but it was obvious that we had come from "over there" and soon we gave in to their questioning. Thus, what remained of the night was spent in talk and in enjoying the warm hospitality of our countrymen. They gave us what they had and, being in a rural district, were not too badly off for food, but had not seen tea or coffee since the war began. My friend Celt, who from previous experience knew how to make himself doubly welcome in Occupied Poland, had warned me that tea and coffee were worth their weight in gold, so I had secreted away many small packets of both. Thus, I was able to make a small contribution to the feast in return for what they were doing for us. We felt we were at home.

'I must admit to being surprised at how much we were at home. After all, it was not only five years that separated us, but five years spent by them in hell, and by us in a comfortable purgatory – no offence meant to British hospitality. They had suffered the horrors of occupation by the Soviets or Germans, or both; over many the wave of modern warfare had twice rolled; but we in England had been comparatively untouched, our lives more or less normal. I had expected that these five years would have changed, if not warped, my compatriots, that awkward pauses would creep into our conversation and that at times words would have had different meanings, yet we slipped into easy conversation, in which there was immediate and mutual understanding, just as though I had dropped in to see friends I had not seen for a week. From the way they talked of Churchill and Roosevelt, from their views on the War and the peace to come, you would have thought they had access to the British and American press. These weren't people cut off from the rest of the world, but free citizens of some Western democracy.

'At nine the next morning we left for Warsaw. A young couple insisted on accompanying us, for in an occupied country it is easy to make a *faux-pas*. You have to be able to read the signs that foretell a round-up, know how to behave when passing through a barrier manned by the Gestapo, what will be considered suspicious, and what normal. We didn't, and we badly needed someone to hold our hands.

'The station was a good three miles away, and we drove there, the four of us, in one of Poland's small two-horse carriages. At the station I saw my first German uniforms. Our guides, of course, paid no attention to them. They found a number of friends also waiting for the train, and were soon deep in conversation.

'When the train came in it proved to be a "smugglers' train", and crowded. We were about the only people on the train not to carry goods for the black market. We forced our way in and were off. Then began the usual procession of little boys selling papers and black-market sweets and cigarettes; and a half-drunken, half-crazy woman made her way along the corridor wailing songs. She jumped from one theme to another; sang a risqué ditty and followed it with one of our Polish ballads, strangely moving in that setting, despite the bad voice. The woman had once been a professional singer, but the Germans had deported her to forced labour in the Reich; she had been bombed in Rostock, and, half-crazy with shell-shock, repatriated home to Warsaw.

'It was a good thing that we had caught that train, for I afterwards learned from Mr Arciszewski, who subsequently became Prime Minister of Poland, that two hundred Gestapo and police were looking for us by seven o'clock that morning. They searched the whole neighbourhood for the parachutists from England, and the packages

which had been seen falling from the sky. Twice they ransacked Arciszewski's house, which was only a few miles from where we had spent the night, and two hours after our departure they had appeared at that very house. But they never discovered any trace of us or of the incriminating packages.

'Thus we came to Warsaw.'

'I never did like Warsaw Central Station. It was built on the site of the old station, and because of the congestion of traffic it had to be built underground. The outbreak of war in 1939 found it still unfinished. Since then it had been bombed and consistently neglected, so that when I saw it again it had become dirty, dreary, and grim. And those German uniforms! Somehow at the station they seemed more aggressive than in the streets.

'I had expected the milling and seething of the crowds, the bludgeoning and cries. They were all there, but what stuck me was the indifference of the people to the sight of the Germans. They seemed to have grown accustomed to them as a necessary though temporary evil, to have adapted their way of life accordingly, and then dismissed them from their minds. After all, it made no difference whether your papers were in order or not; whether you were guilty or innocent. The German terror was incalculable and the fact of being a Pole a deadly sin in itself – so you let it at that.

'Our young guides shepherded us through the throng and out of the station into the main street, crowded as I have never seen it. Not only were the pavements full, but the street itself. There were some horse-cabs plying for hire, but these were dreadfully expensive, and there were the bicycle rickshaws to which petrol-less Europe had been reduced. Shortly before I left even these disappeared from the streets, as the Germans deported the rickshaw boys for forced labour to the Reich.

'We made our way along the Aleje Jerozolimskie to the address at which I was to report. This had been given me while still in London. The house we had to go to was close to the station, but we tried a short cut to avoid the crowds, and in the end it took three times as long to get there. We were a little apprehensive, for the address was now two months old, but all was well, and the door was opened by a middle-aged woman, whom I instantly recognized as the sister of a friend of mine serving with the Polish forces. After a perfunctory exchange of passwords (which seemed very silly to both of us) we went in. There we met another lady, our hostess, who, fortunately, did not recognize me. She knew, of course, that we came from England and I was able to give her news about her brother in England, whom I happened to know. We stayed for a few hours in the house, until another woman came and took me to the hiding place where I was to stay for the next few days, while my companion was led off elsewhere.

'My temporary hostess, whose husband, an army colonel, had been made a prisoner of war by the Germans in 1939, was a doctor working in a medical institution, now controlled by the Germans, where she earned 450 zloty a month. Now, a pound of butter cost some 100 zl. so that such a salary was far from sufficient; indeed, at that time one could only lead a modest existence for about 3000 zl. per month. In addition, my hostess received some 200 zl. from the Underground movement; all it could afford to give for her work, so that in order to live she was forced to sell many of her belongings. Even in the short time I was there, I saw a carpet disappear, while her silver and china were sadly depleted. She was lucky enough, however, to have a loyal and devoted maid, who had an extraordinary gift for black-marketing. Jasia was her name, and Jasia had a friend who was employed by a German butcher. The German butcher sold his meat to the Germans at 12 zl. a kilogram, but he also liked to make a little something on the side, and sold his meat to his employee, but at a price of anything between 30 and 50 zl. Jasia and her friend resold it to the Poles for approximately 80 to 90 zl., and thus made a thousand or so a month which good girl that she was, she shared with her mistress. Their joint income therefore came to some 2000 zl. – which was still inadequate for a living.

'Jasia was plain. She was an ordinary peasant girl and her heart was pure gold. One evening as I was getting ready for bed she burst into my room, wet, muddy, tearful and in a dreadful state. It appeared that she had a daughter in a convent school for poor children some twenty miles outside Warsaw and that day had tried to go to see her. The suburban train had been stopped in an open field, the passengers made to get out and stand in a muddy pond beside the line, while the Germans searched them and examined their papers. Some of the men were detained and the rest released, but the passengers weren't allowed to get back on the train or continue on their way, so poor

Jasia had had to walk fifteen miles back to Warsaw without seeing her daughter. These senseless and entirely unnecessary little cruelties were one of the many unbearable aspects of the German occupation.

'The two women ate only twice a day, a breakfast which consisted of some kind of coffee made of roasted grain, and bread and butter, and a second and last meal at about five o'clock in the afternoon, at which the main dish was a vegetable soup of sorts in which, every four or five days, minute pieces of meat would be floating. Both women had been arrested many times, but had so far always managed to get themselves released.

'Owing to the peculiar conditions resulting from the necessity for secrecy in a mass conspiratorial movement, I was unable to get in touch with the Chief Delegate of the Polish Government until five days had elapsed. That was the official title of the head of the Underground Government thereby acknowledging its allegiance to the Government in London. In the meantime, I tried to adapt myself to the new conditions. I never got accustomed to the German uniforms. I couldn't distinguish a Gestapo officer from an Air Force private, and never knew who was dangerous and who not.

'Contrary to my expectations, Warsaw on the surface did not look as devastated as did some parts of London, yet it had been bombed and shelled for many days in 1939, and bombed again from the air when the Russians staged their counter-offensive. Most of the houses destroyed had been pulled down, and in some cases were replaced by shacks, very clean looking from the outside. Many window panes had been replaced, while the worst damaged part of the city – the former Jewish ghetto – was surrounded by a high wall over which it was practically impossible to see anything.

'The ghetto had been destroyed by the Germans and since then had served as an execution ground for Poles. Of course, one never knew how many were executed for the shots one heard every morning were nothing to go by. There were days in which, according to German announcements, several hundreds were shot, but no day passed without some major or minor executions. The Germans were busy pulling down what houses remained, and hundreds of lorries were engaged in clearing the rubble. Similar, though smaller, ghettos had been made in many of the smaller towns and were meeting with a similar fate.

'All the same, the aspect of the city amazed me; it had changed so much. The inner courtyards of all the bigger houses and buildings had been turned into vegetable gardens: the grass strips down the centre of the broader avenues had been dug up and made into allotments (that in Pulaska Street was growing potatoes). Vegetables were everywhere.

'Nevertheless the shop windows were as well filled as those of London, and better than those I saw in Italy. The day after my arrival I went with my "guardian angel" to buy some shoes. I was given the choice of some twenty pairs, chose one, and asked the price. It was 4250 zl., which I paid without tendering coupons. The salesman confessed that if I had been a German he would have said that he had no shoes, because he would have been obliged to sell them at the official price, which was then 56 zl. Also, he did not like serving Germans. He added that German *agents provocateurs* had been "rather rare" during the past year.

'Almost the same thing happened when one went into a Polish restaurant. Nearly all the pre-war ones had been commandeered by the Germans and, at that time, served abominable food, but at controlled prices. As early as 1940 the Poles began to run their own restaurants, first in a semi-clandestine way, and then quite openly. They were expensive but the standards were only slightly below pre-war, and for that reason were sometimes covertly frequented by Germans. The first time I went to such a place with a friend, contrary to my habits, in order to preserve anonimity, I sat with my back to the door when, half-way through the meal, my host suddenly asked in a whisper: "Have you got your identity card?" I said I had. "Well," he went on, "don't look round, but three Gestapo with automatic pistols in their hands have just come in, and will probably demand to see our papers." After a few minutes he told me that all six (three others having come in by the kitchen entrance) were leaving. Later the manager explained that as only a few tables were occupied, and as the clients were mostly elderly people, the Gestapo had not asked for identity cards, preferring to accept a bribe of 10,000 zl. and go.

'There was no lack of drink in Warsaw. In fact, pursuing their policy of the biological destruction of the Polish nation, the Germans deliberately made it cheap and easy to get and this, of course, did untold harm.

'I had only been a few days in Warsaw, and such care was being taken to preserve my incognito that I fondly imagined my presence there was unknown except to a small circle of the initiate. Then lunching in a restaurant I suddenly heard one of a group of men sitting at the next table say: "Do you know that Retinger arrived from London three days ago?" When I asked our authorities for an explanation, I was told that the Underground organisation in Warsaw alone was so big that it was impossible to ensure each person's discretion.

'People must talk. Some days later I went to a small village in connection with a rather important action of the Underground involving several hundred men; someone talked, and the action had to be postponed. A month later I was again in the village, and learned that the Underground authorities had put up posters in all the neighbouring villages reprimanding the local lack of discretion and warning the population that anyone caught would be whipped. There was a postscript saying that anyone tearing down the posters would also be punished. The local German police learned about it, and went to see the chief of the village, with whom I later stayed, demanding removal of the posters. The chief refused, stating quite frankly that he was frightened to do it, but suggested that the Germans do it themselves. And they refused. At the time of my visit the posters were still displayed all over the district.

'Many of the black-market restaurants were famous, some for their food, others for the numbers of those shot or arrested in them. Famous for its food was the one to which a friend took me assuring me that no one would recognize me. The moment we entered we were greeted by a bowing individual, who had been the head waiter of Warsaw's most famous hotel and my good friend for many a year. He gazed round and, after a moment's thought, led us to a table and proposed that we leave the menu to him, which we gladly did. Here I must mention that I have always had the habit of drinking water as a chaser after a glass of vodka. He brought us each a glass of vodka, and, for me, a glass of water. He never smiled, or winked, but that glass of water proved he knew and remembered me. In this he showed himself a better conspirator than a poet friend of mine, who chased my cab half-way down a crowded street shouting: "Hallo Retinger, stop! Blast you, stop."

'We had an excellent meal, and when we were preparing to leave our head-water friend appeared to ask if everything had been all right and added: "I'm glad you sat at this table. I particularly wanted you to, as it was here that Dubois [a famous socialist leader] was arrested and taken out to his death."

3

As Stefan Korbonski jokingly remarked in his memoirs, when Retinger arrived in Warsaw the consumption of vodka perceptibly increased. Everybody wanted to be hospitable and there were plenty of people to see. Retinger wanted to find out as much as he could and talk to the widest circle of people. He wanted to test for himself what conditions were really like, and how good was the Underground organization. He nearly took part in an ambush on a German military train, but the Chief Delegate got wind of it and thought that this was really too much.

Retinger's arrival caused the greatest sensation. Of course, the Gestapo very soon knew about it and it verged on a miracle that they never caught him. True, his physical appearance was unobtrusive and he did not stand out in a crowd. But also he followed his own unorthodox whims, and in the end this perhaps might have baffled those who were on his tracks. It also sometimes baffled his hosts.

The Underground leaders spoke to him of their problems and difficulties but also of the efficiency and power of their organization. One day Retinger invited several members of the "Shadow Government", about a dozen people in all, to lunch in a private room in one of the well-known black market restaurants. The Chief Delegate and his colleagues were taken aback. This really was madness. Should anything go wrong, the civil administration could suffer a shattering blow. Did Retinger realize it? Was it thoughtlessness or did he want to put them to a test? After much consultation they decided it was the latter. All right – they would accept the challenge and come. At the appointed time everybody turned up and it was only later that Retinger was told that two squads of the Home Army, armed to the teeth, lay hidden in strategic points all around the block in which the lunch took place. Fortunately everything went well and everybody was proud and relieved.

It would need many pages to describe what Poland was like in those days. As time goes by and the War itself recedes into the past, it becomes more and more difficult to convey the atmosphere and describe the conditions for the benefit of those who did not experience it themselves.

The reader might perhaps glean some impressions from the following notes recorded by Retinger on his return to England:

'The word conspiracy has an ugly sound in Western ears. How different was its meaning in Poland, where, if anything, a person was ashamed not to be a conspirator. National conspiracy was the term given to the continuation of the national life carried on in secret under enemy occupation. Almost from the day in 1939 when the Government crossed into Rumania, conspiracy began and, later, it came to embrace almost the entire nation.

'It was not an easy thing, especially on so wide a basis. It required organization and staff-work; discipline on a national scale and endless precautions. Roughly speaking, one may say that the Polish Underground came to be organized as a large number of small circles tangent on two larger, concentric ones; the first the military, the second the civilian organization. This did not make for quick or easy communication, nor was it intended to. Thus, it was several days before I was able to meet the Chief Government Delegate in Warsaw. The woman in whose charge I had been placed when I reached Warsaw had first to report my arrival to the head of her section, for she had no knowledge of what or who was higher up. The head of the section then reported to the military commander in Warsaw, and he, through Staff Headquarters, communicated with the Chief Delegate's immediate staff. This sounds like another variety of red tape, but in this case it was insulating tape, and very necessary. Everyone in Poland, and particularly in Warsaw, was literally in hourly danger of arrest, and once caught was automatically tortured, whether he belonged to the organization or not, just in case.

'It will be readily understood that not everyone was able to stand interrogation, and that occasionally names and information did slip out. In the early days, before the true extent of German cruelty and inventiveness was realized a more than Kiplingesque heroism was expected of those who fell into the Germans' hands. It was soon realized, however, that modern methods are often stronger than the human will. Those in possession of secrets, names or addresses, nearly all carried poison, but this was often in the awkward form of a glass phial with a cork or stopper that had to be removed, and the phial raised to the lips, all of which took valuable time, often long enough for the suicide to be prevented. Others relied on being able to strike their interrogator in the face, an unheard-of impertinence which almost invariably invoked a spasm of blind fury and a welcome shot. But the guards were soon wise to this, and such attempts were not always successful. When I arrived in Poland, I had on me a minute "L" pill that could be held in the mouth for hours, or even swallowed, without any harmful results, but which, when bitten through or crushed between the teeth, caused death within fifteen seconds. I was widely envied the possession of this pill, and so often was I made to promise to send a friend one when I got back, that almost the first thing I did on returning to Italy was to ask to have them sent to the Underground in Warsaw.

'In conspiratorial work real names, for obvious reasons, are never used. Some people even had several pseudonyms, especially those wanted by the Gestapo. Being a bad conspirator myself, I sometimes got lost in the maze of pseudonyms, not only those of others, but of myself as well, for I had five altogether. There were moments when I did not know which one to use, but I am proud to say that only once did I give my real name over the telephone.

'Occasionally, all this led to incredible confusion. I came across it myself in a small way. My Prime Minister had asked me to get in touch as soon as I could with a man whom we may call Andrew. Shortly after my arrival I had met a tall, good-looking man of about forty, who was in charge of Civil Warfare, and for a few days I saw him almost constantly. He was then using three pseudonyms, but I understood that he had several others. As I had still heard nothing of this Andrew, I asked him one day to put me in touch with him, explaining that the Prime Minister wanted us to meet. He began to laugh and said: "I am Andrew." His real name was Stefan Korbonski.

'Valentine and Anthony were the two names of a jailer in the main Warsaw prison. This man was the liaison between the prisoners inside and the organisation outside; the one knew him as Anthony and the others as Valentine. To confuse the Germans he tried to make the name of Valentine hated by the prisoners, and that of Anthony hated by the outside organization. The result was that the prisoners warned the organization against Valentine, while the organization warned the prisoners against Anthony, and confusion reigned for over a month, until both realized the identity of Valentine Anthony. But in the meantime he might easily have come to a sticky end.

'A word about women in the Underground, for theirs were the hardest, the most thankless and often the most dangerous posts. Apart from those serving directly in the Home Army as nurses, couriers, and even as soldiers, women played a large part in the Underground press, in education and in military and civilian organizations. The real heroines were those who were doing liaison work, for their identity, by reason of their duties, could not be hidden as strictly as was necessary.

'One arduous job, which was almost entirely left to women was the transport of arms, possibly because it always seems more natural for a woman to be carrying a parcel than for a man. Whenever news was received that the Gestapo was to raid a place in which arms happened to be hidden it was the women who quickly moved them elsewhere. In twos, three or fours, they walked with their parcels, or shopping bags, behind their "pilot", watching his every move. The pilot was important. His duty was to watch out for German patrols, control points, or any signs of a round-up, and signal a warning. The women who did this work were mostly of the intelligentsia, for it required quick wit and enterprise. The transport of ammunition and pistols was comparatively easy, for though heavy they are not bulky, but Sten guns were another problem.

'Every organization, however secret, has its clerical staff. In the Underground this work was really difficult. Files had to be split up in different, often distant points, but woe betide the secretary who couldn't find or had mislaid a letter or a document. Obviously, it would be highly dangerous to run an office, so the typists of the Underground changed their place of work sometimes even several times in the course of a day. This put a great strain on the messengers, most of whom were women, and glad indeed they were when nine o'clock came and the curfew put an end to their work.

'In Poland the clandestine activity of the political parties initially took the form of an Underground press. Within a few months all the main groups were circulating news bulletins, and while I was in Warsaw there were well over a hundred clandestine publications in the General Government alone.

'The head of the Underground, called the Chief Delegate, and later Home Deputy Prime Minister, was appointed by the Polish Government in London on the proposal of the main political groups, and in each case the choice was unanimous. Later on, a Council of National Unity with a consultative status was also formed in Warsaw, and worked in great harmony with the civil and military administrations. At the time of my departure at the end of July 1944, the National Council represented the four main parties and a few lesser groups.

'But the main branch of the Underground was, of course, the military. As early as 1939 General Sikorski had managed to send a few staff officers from France, including General Tokarzewski, to assist in its organization. He went from Warsaw to Lvov, which was then occupied by the Russians, and was captured within two months of his arrival by the NKVD and sent to a concentration camp near Archangel. I got him out when I was in Russia in 1941 and later, when he had recovered, he was placed in command of a Polish division. His successor was General Rowecki, known as "Grot", and it was he who really gave the Underground a sound military basis. Grot was captured by the Germans in the early summer of 1943 and killed, after being wantonly tortured. He left behind him an efficient organization, which had the best of relationships with the civilian branch of the movement. He was succeeded by his Chief of Staff, General Bor Komorowski, who became famous as a result of the Warsaw Rising. Under his command the Underground Army was broadened, while collaboration with the civilian administration was brought even closer, and weekly conferences were begun with the Chief Delegate, at which all common problems were discussed.

'I nearly missed General Bor the first time I was to meet him. My instructions were to be at Chmielna Street at twelve o'clock, but I wrongly noted the time and arrived at eleven. The door was opened by a rather scared-looking woman, who exclaimed: "Thank God you've come early." The night before the Gestapo had raided the house and, on leaving, had announced that they would be back at midday. General Bor had been warned, but they could not get a message to me. The meeting was still on, but elsewhere, and a guide was to meet me at twelve o'clock at a certain street-corner.

'When I finally reached the General's lodgings, almost his first words were that he was a poor man and that it was a wretchedly poor lunch that he was going to give me. It consisted of a single dish of oatmeal, something I much dislike. I was much impressed by the General. Though in mufti, as he had to be, his bearing and manners were those of a soldier. His neat appearance and the way he wore his clothes showed that in happier days he must have been a bit of a dandy. He took no interest in squabbles over domestic affairs. Like every patriot, he was deeply concerned about his country's struggle for existence. His soldier's training and soldier's faith made loyalty to his legal Government a matter of course. Bor struck me as a real leader of men, and great, if only in his simplicity. It was easy to talk to him.

'History abounds in examples of spontaneous risings against an occupying power, but I know of no other example of an exiled government, disposing of armed forces abroad, building up and directing a properly organized army within the country it has had to leave, and it is interesting to speculate on what would have happened had Poland been as accessible to the British Air Force as France and Yugoslavia, and able to receive the same amount of supplies from her allies.

'The tide of war rolled over Poland in 1939 washing away all forms of public administration. It was therefore around the political parties that movements and organizations sprang up. The first in the field to join the Underground movement were the socialists, in spite of their pacifist and anti-military character. The Nationalist and Peasant Parties began to recruit their own secret forces, which remained separate for a time, and then merged with those of the Government, the so-called "Armja Krajowa" (Home Army). By the end of July 1944 the Commander of the Underground Military Organization had nearly half a million men under his orders.

'Meanwhile, instructions, funds, and also a certain quantity of arms were sent from Britain, as well as a few instructors, nearly a third of whom had been killed by the Germans by July 1944.

'The Home Army had to train and wait; but there were certain units round Warsaw, and in the less populated parts of the country, mostly in Eastern and Southern Poland, which did carry out a considerable amount of guerrilla activity, and were grievous thorns in the side of the Germans.

'A large proportion of the sabotage and diversionary operations were carried out by cadets, before they could finally pass out. These were real trials, not only of valour but of ingenuity and quick-wittedness. For instance, five of the best pupils in a cadet school near Warsaw were given the task of blowing up four big German transport planes on an aerodrome outside the city. The cadets succeeded in creeping up to the barbed wire fence during the night, cutting it, and then silencing the German sentry. They were inside the planes before anyone noticed; nobody even knew they were there until the four planes went up in a simultaneous explosion, which brought the guards tumbling out of their hut, to be met a couple of hundred yards away by a brisk fire from five automatic pistols. The cadets escaped and returned to the city, entering it from the other side in the early morning.

'On another occasion the Home Army had been ordered to destroy a German ammunition train on the main line from Warsaw to the East. Things went wrong, however, and they only succeeded in derailing three wagons and in blocking the line for twelve hours, while the Germans' casualty list was only eleven. HQ were not satisfied with this, and learning of another ammunition train leaving that same week, entrusted the task to a company of boy scouts. (I was invited to take part, but was refused permission by the Chief Delegate.) The place chosen was the same as before. The new task was very much harder, especially since the three derailed wagons were still lying beside the track, and were guarded. The scouts took up position in a little wood not far from the line. When the time came they succeeded in disposing of the guard, and laid their mines so well that when the train came along almost all its wagons were derailed; about seventy Germans were killed and many more wounded; while the line was cut for over forty-eight hours.

'However, the story does not end there. These lads had to get back unnoticed, and be at their work at the usual time in the morning. According to orders, they were supposed to walk half round the city and enter it on foot. However, when six o'clock came and time was running short, some decided to take an early suburban train. As they were alone in the compartment they pulled out their pistols and began cleaning them. The train stopped at a station, their pistols were hidden and another passenger got in. When they saw that he was a Pole, they pulled out their pistols again and continued cleaning them, while their elderly fellow-passenger gazed at them in goggle-eyed astonishment. A station or two farther on two Germans got in. The doors closed, the train got under way, and the innocent-looking youths suddenly produced pistols and invited the Germans to put their hands up. They were relieved of their arms, their documents, and, at the next station, the boys escaped. Needless to say, such foolhardiness did not go without retribution.

'Numerous and widespread as were these acts of sabotage, they were not yet on a really large scale. The cost of German revenge and repressive measures was too high to warrant such action till the decisive moment came, as it did during the Soviet advance, early in 1944.

'By 1940, if not before, the peasants began to organize themselves into two distinct, but not strictly defined bodies, whose original purpose was mainly that of self-defence. Though organized by the leaders of the Peasant Party in collaboration with its representatives in London, these organizations were mainly spontaneous in origin.

'The *Chlopska Straz*, as the organization was called, developed rapidly, and before long covered all parts of Southern Poland, whence it later spread to the North. The fighting units of this organization were known as Peasant Battalions, and when I arrived in the spring of 1944 they were present in nearly all villages. The units consisted of from twenty to forty men most of them under thirty. Though mainly of peasant origin, they were drawn from all stations in life, and although I was not surprised to see among them both the son of the squire and the son of say, his father's gardener, being myself of the pre-war generation, I was struck by the fact that social status did not automatically carry with it the right to command. Perhaps the legend of the superior class had not stood the test of such conditions, but in the twenty-odd villages I visited, in only two were the units led by sons of the so-called upper or middle classes; one was the son of the local squire and the other the son of the school-teacher. Almost all units included people who were not peasants, but it was invariably the ablest who were in command. Everybody seemed to find this just and reasonable, if not natural, while the peasants did not boast about it. Here was true national unity transcending class, a good omen for the future of my country.

'In the early days these Peasant Battalions were badly off for officers and NCOs, so they established their own schools which by 1944 had provided them with a large proportion of their requirements. The reason for this shortage of officers and NCOs was, of course, that a great percentage of them had been taken prisoner or had made their way out of the country. As a result many military schools were set up. When situated near the larger towns garrisoned by the Germans they were held in the greatest secrecy, but in the more remote parts of the country they were run almost openly. In fact, in the rural districts the Germans had so little control that by the end of 1943 several areas of the country were almost completely under the domination of the Home Army, who openly showed themselves in Polish uniforms.

'As Premier Mikolajczyk said in March 1944, Poland was Polish at night. This was true of many parts of the country; indeed, practically nowhere would a German in uniform risk going out alone at night. Both patrolling and punitive expeditions were carried out in strength and heavily armed.

'During 1944 there were numerous cases of smaller townships and villages being openly occupied by the Home Army for short periods. In Grojec, for instance, an important agricultural centre some thirty miles to the south-west of Warsaw, the Germans imprisoned at the end of 1943 several of the local Underground leaders, who had to be rescued. One night the Home Forces, some seven hundred strong, entered the town, occupied the court buildings and the jail, and surrounded the German post, cutting their communications. They liberated twenty-seven prisoners without suffering any casualties.

'In 1943 it was agreed to incorporate all military organizations formed by the different political parties into the Home Army, and I was told at my very first interview with the Commander-in-Chief that the processes was well advanced. A great difficulty, however, arose with the so-called NSZ (National Armed Forces), which were organized by the diehard nationalist groupings, somewhat resembling the Ulster Volunteers of 1914.

'In late April 1944, after long negotiations, the NSZ agreed to come under the orders of the Commander of the Home Army but their leader, General Zegota, died suddenly and his successor repudiated the agreement. In condemning such action, one must not forget that these diehards were mainly moved by a deep resentment against Soviet Russia. During the Warsaw Rising, however, the NSZ joined hands most loyally with all the patriotic defenders.

'By 1944 all offensive action was, of course, under the command of the Home Army, but earlier there had been many cases of spontaneous action. Typical was the case of Andrzej Jasinski, the son of a schoolteacher in the small provincial town of Mielec in Southern Poland. In 1942 he organized a band of young men to harass the Germans. Young Jasinski, animated by the spirit of resistance, unruly, wild and dynamic, started – on his own – to attack the Germans in his neighbourhood. At first, his band mainly sought arms, ammunition and food. Soon they had developed into a Robin Hood organization, taking from the rich to give to the poor, the rich being the Germans and the poor the Poles. The rural population reacted instantly in their favour, and bands sprang up between Sandomierz, Lublin, Bochnia and Nowy Sacz. They became known by the nickname "Jedrusie", taken from their leader, and were secretly supported by the whole population of this fairly large district, which offered them refuge in case of distress, and recruits in the event of success. Naturally, some outlaws joined them, and some – luckily few – cases of banditry were cited against them by the Germans, but the peasants overlooked the mischief they sometimes did, and proudly boasted of their courage. The original leader of the first of the bands, Jasinski, was caught by the Germans at the end of 1943 and executed in one of the villages in which I stayed in May 1944.

'By the end of June 1944 the Home Forces were in virtual control of all Poland, outside of the actual front lines or that part already occupied by the Russians, and had more than proved their value in assisting the Russian advance. In the area of Kowel a unit of some four thousand fought with the Russians against the Germans, taking the town itself, and many similar cases were reported from other parts of Eastern Poland. But their enthusiasm cooled when they found out that once the fighting was over they were disarmed by the Russian commanders, and in some cases arrested, and even executed, or put in concentration camps.

'Before the rising in Warsaw those who accepted orders from the Headquarters of the Home Army, despite all the conspiratorial difficulties, certainly exceeded forty per cent of the whole adult population of military age.

'The Home Forces had the same influence, but not as good an organization, in those parts of Poland which had been incorporated into the German Reich. In this area German control was infinitely better than in the General Government, because German civilians were resettled there and because the industry there was so much more important to the Germans. Moreover, those regions were more densely populated and only in Pomerania were there big forests where the partisans could find a refuge. Finally, the frontier was heavily guarded and it was exceedingly difficult even to get into the "Wartheland" and Silesia.

'The secret civilian administration of the country was set up late in 1939, on the instructions of General Sikorski, whose representative was Mr Swietochowski. When he was killed by the Germans in 1940, he was succeeded by a Delegate with full powers, Mr Ratajski, former Burgomaster of Poznan, replaced later by Professor Piekalkiewicz. From the spring of 1943 this post was occupied by Mr Jankowski, known as "the Doctor". His predecessor had been caught, tortured and put to death by the Germans, and it says much for the efficiency of the conspiracy that his capture was due to a mere accident, although his name and identity were known to the Germans. He was tortured in Berlin for several months and was sent back dying to Warsaw. Our men recovered his body in a most pitiful condition. Almost every bone had been broken, a proof of how brutally he had been tortured before he died.

'Jankowski was a man of about sixty-two, not very tall, thinnish and wiry, fully of energy and with a very high sense of responsibility. Notwithstanding his age, he was amazingly active and incredibly brave. It was mainly thanks to him that there was no friction amongst the various political parties and between the civilian and military administration. His personal contacts and relationship with General Bor, the commanding officer of the Home Army, were perfect, and during their weekly conference they discussed and settled all points concerning the two aspects of the Polish Underground movement. Another weekly conference with the chiefs of the political parties brought uniformity within the ranks of the political bodies. Jankowski held the rank of Deputy Prime Minister of the Government in London, and was the Government's Chief Executive in Poland. His authority in civilian matters was supreme. He was assisted by three delegates, afterwards appointed Ministers, who represented the main political trends, and directed the activities of the various departments, which formed a shadow, but real, administration. He was also the head of the Polish Security Corps, which was responsible for stamping out all crime against the State, i.e. collaboration with the Germans, banditry, and other breaches of the rules of the Underground movement.

'A further responsibility of his was the organization of the Underground educational system. This was perhaps the most important activity of the Underground, and very successful as well. The higher education was organized and controlled by the Department of Education, which also gave financial help to students or teachers without means, maintained a body of inspectors who visited all schools, especially in the country, and ensured that the requisite standard was maintained. It had registered with it more than fifty thousand university and high school students in the General Government, and provided education for over a quarter of the pre-war number of students. In addition there was a great deal of private instruction, especially for the younger children.

'At first sight it would seem that such hole-and-corner methods must have considerably lowered the standard of education. This, I understand, was not so. Classes were held in private houses and flats, and the pupils never exceeded a dozen. As a result, students received individual attention and benefited accordingly. Also they were keen to learn. No one would have risked his life to attend classes if he hadn't been desperately keen to acquire knowledge. My companion Celt, who is himself a lawyer, attended some of the classes in Commercial Law, and was astonished by the high standard of the pupils' knowledge and of the instruction given. The subjects taught were those of any good university curriculum. Practical instruction was a matter of considerably greater difficulty, but this, too, was arranged, and available even in subjects such as medicine, engineering and chemistry.'

4

For history's sake a detestable episode should also be recorded. In the preceding chapter mention was made of the necessity for secrecy while planning Retinger's trip to Poland. It wasn't solely due to the fear of the Gestapo. Among the Poles there were also men who could not be trusted. During the Algerian war General de Gaulle used the apt phrase "lost soldiers" to describe the rebel French officers. They certainly bore a certain similarity to those who plotted against Retinger in 1944. Among his papers there is only this very brief note about it:

> 'As the reader will have gathered, I was in no way an admirer of Marshal Pilsudski's policy or tactics, although I always recognized his great strength of character, energy and initiative. However, his friends and partisans obviously had no liking for me. Moreover, although not anti-militarist, I dislike any kind of interference by army officers in the realm of politics, and was therefore detested by many Polish

professional soldiers. I was also opposed to the principle and to most of the ways of the Secret Service, especially in political matters. I despised, and still do, any kind of spying.

'In 1941 I was one of the leading protagonists of an Agreement with Russia. In many Polish circles I was hated bitterly, and this hatred, although much diminished, has not died out.

'My mission to Poland was kept a strict secret, but this secrecy could not be maintained for very long. There were, therefore, in both England and Poland, people prepared to bring about my downfall. A provocative article in the Polish press in London, referring to my trip to Poland while it was still supposed to be secret, was stopped at the last minute, not, alas! by the Polish censorship, but by the British Minister of Information, while in Poland itself one of my friends at whose house I was staying for a few days told me, to my great surprise, that he had been warned by a lieutenant of the Home Army that they had orders to liquidate me. Knowing that I was staying with this friend they wanted to warn him so that he would not be involved. He added that the liquidation of "a most dangerous person" would be recompensed by a military decoration. A couple of days later, had it not been for the intervention of a young woman of my acquaintance, I would have been shot in Warsaw, and one or two other attempts were made on my life.

'Not being sure of the facts, and knowing the gossipy character of any clandestine movement, I complained only perfunctorily about these machinations to General Bor Komorowski, who certainly knew nothing about it.'

After the war Zbigniew Stypulkowski, one of the Underground leaders who later escaped to the West, told the story of how one day a young officer of the Home Army came to consult him about an order he had received to shoot Retinger. The officer wasn't sure who Retinger was, but the whole thing seemed suspicious and he wanted the advice of somebody in authority. Needless to say, he was told to lay off. But as a result the Underground Government was alerted.

Investigations were made but it was difficult to get at the facts as it seemed that some people in the Secret Service were involved. They had channels of their own, and, although subject to overall governmental authority, as usual it was hard to unravel the truth. Obviously however, somewhere something was wrong and the Chief Delegate entrusted

Franciszek Bialas, a member of the Shadow Government, a good and trusted friend of Retinger, with the job of keeping him protected. Also some harsh words were said to the people who were in charge of the Secret Service, and later everything was well.

A long time after the War, more facts came to the surface. As late as 1966, there was some correspondence about it in *Kultura*, a Polish émigré periodical published in France. It was alleged that some intelligence officers, acting on their own and in highest secrecy, having learnt that Retinger had gone to Warsaw radioed their associates in Poland. Retinger, whose personality they could not comprehend otherwise than in terms of somebody or other's 'Secret Agent' – British, Russian or what have you – was to them obviously engaged in some evil mission. It was both secret and inexplicable and therefore particularly dangerous. The warning and the suggestion sent from London fell on fertile ground – and simple minds readily began to plot a crime.

5

By the end of May Retinger had completed his mission. A month previously the first plane from the West had successfully landed and taken off; another was due at the end of May. A makeshift landing strip was prepared in a different part of the country, and Retinger was billeted several miles away. On the appointed night a horse and cart came to fetch him. They drove to the place, near a little wood, where he met his party. The youngster who drove him was told to return.

There were low clouds in the sky and only now and again the moon would light the field chosen for the landing. At last the plane came in, but from the wrong direction. Retinger found himself at the other end of the field. Just at that moment the moon was hidden and in the darkness confusion arose. Retinger, who still suffered from night blindness, threw off his coat and started to run. He was quickly separated from his party and lost in the night. The plane did not wait. Obeying strict orders not to delay the take-off, it veered round and was gone. Retinger wondered how to get back. Somehow he stumbled to the road he had come from, and there to his great relief found the same cart. The young driver's curiosity was stronger than his orders. He had waited to witness this extraordinary event. They started back, but in order to avoid a bridge, where there was always the risk of some unwelcome encounter, they made a detour and forded a stream. In the dark, the cart suddenly tipped and Retinger fell into the water. They continued for several miles. A few days later he was paralysed. He wrote about it as follows:

> 'At the beginning of June 1944 I fell ill with polyneuritis, and lost the use of my feet and hands. It started quite suddenly one day when I was returning by tram to my clandestine home, with the appalling feeling that I could not walk. Within three or four days I was also unable to move my hands. My friends called in a very good nerve specialist, who told me that it would be many months before I returned to a normal state of health, and at least four before I should be able to walk. He warned me that I should get worse before I got better, and that I should suffer very much. Luckily his prognosis was not realized so far as suffering was concerned.
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> 'I had to go to a private clinic which could still provide treatment almost as good as in normal times. With the exception of the doctor in charge of my case, no one knew my identity, though they suspected of course that I had something to do with the Underground movement. There I lay in bed, unable to move, but since I was not in much pain and only my hands and legs were affected, I was able to see all the people I had to see. To the despair and exasperation of my friends, I had a great number of visitors.
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> 'A short while later my friends told me that our own agents within the Gestapo had discovered that the Germans knew I was ill in a private clinic. This meant finding a new hiding place, where I could still lie quietly in bed and receive the necessary treatment. In haste I was transferred to a hospital for the poor, where it was thought that all trace of me would disappear among the hundreds of destitute and often nameless inmates. Conspiracy has its rules, and I quite saw the necessity for the choice of a poor man's hospital, but did they need to choose one for the treatment of venereal disease? There was, of course, no danger of infection, but I was so horrified by my surroundings that it was days before I would consent to have a bath. Here visitors were strictly forbidden, but I soon broke the regulation, and before long was as busy with political matters as in the previous hospital. It was while I was in this curious situation that I got to know and had long talks with the Dean of the Medical Faculty and the Chancellor of Warsaw (Underground) University.
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> 'The time came when I had to think of returning to England, in spite of my inability to move. As I was obliged to take the train for a whole night's journey, the Head of the Hospital armed me with a letter asking the German authorities to give every possible help to an old man who was very ill. The trains, of course, were over-crowded to an extent that nobody who had not seen them for himself could realize.
>
> 'I arrived at the station at least an hour before the scheduled time of departure, accompanied by my male nurse from the hospital and my companion Celt. At the station a splendid idea came to us. Celt took the letter from the hospital to the German station-master, and putting it down before him promised him two thousand zloty if a free compartment were found for us. When the train pulled in, the station-master, assisted by two other German railwaymen, cleared a way for me, emptied a compartment and deposited me inside – deposited is an exact description of what happened, for being unable to walk I was carried along the platform by my companion and the male nurse just as if I had been a piece of luggage. The crowd saw that I was a Pole and rendered my friends what assistance they could. And so, after much discomfort, I arrived in Cracow about six o'clock in the morning.
>
> 'The train stopped far from the exit reserved for Poles – at least five hundred yards away – and I shuddered at the mere idea of having to go down and up, through those tunnels and staircases. Instead, I asked my companion to carry me across the rails to the exit used only by the Germans, as it was nearer, and he took me pick-a-back, to the delight of the small crowd already assembled at the station. We headed straight for the exit marked "Germans only", where I asked permission to be carried through, and we plunged through the doorway, which was crowded with Gestapo and other plain-clothes officials. Outside we were met by a young friend who had a carriage waiting for us, and off we drove to our hiding-place.
>
> 'Only after our arrival in London did we stop to consider the dangers of our journey. Not until then did we remember that the Gestapo had my photograph and knew of my illness and must have been on the look-out for an elderly Pole who could not walk.
>
> 'In 1944 Cracow was not a pleasant place to be in. It was the centre of the German Civil and Military Administration of the General Government, and a swarm of officials and their dependents, computed, with the German colonists, at forty thousand, had settled there. It was also full of refugees from the East and West. Life in Cracow was

indeed hard. The house in which I stayed belonged to an elderly professor, who lived there with his three young daughters, all of whom worked – for they had to – in German businesses, and in their spare time took an active part in the Underground. This family's total income was under one thousand zloty a month, and how they managed to live I don't know, for the professor was a proud man and would accept no help from any of his friends.

'While I was in Cracow a monstrous public execution of Poles took place after a mass round-up, which had lodged five thousand people in jail. One of those executed was Colonel Spychalski, a schoolfriend of mine, with whom I had learned English. He had been caught by the Russians when they occupied Lvov in 1939 and deported. When I was in Russia I succeeded in securing his release, and he insisted on going back to Poland. He was that rare being, both a soldier and a saint, and was widely known and honoured. Unfortunately, enemy propaganda found fit to try to dishonour Spychalski by claiming he had agreed to become the new Quisling Mayor of Praga (a suburb of Warsaw), although he had been executed by the Germans earlier on.

'This, my third visit to Cracow, was brief, for I left again the following morning, once again enduring the torment of a train journey. Our immediate destination was a small town where the local Underground took charge of us for a few hours, and incidentally served up one of the best meals I ate during the War – the result of days of intensive preparation. Later in the afternoon a horse cart was procured for us, and we drove off to a point about nine miles away in the forest to meet another carriage for another and even longer journey by narrow lanes and byways to a village, where we were to await the plane that would take us back to England.

'The moment I saw the coachman I said to myself: "Sam Weller!" He was just the type, but Eastern European fashion. Like all cabbies, he wore clothes which were as old as, if not older than his nag, and he wore a soft hat, a very soft hat; his face was shaven, but far from clean shaven, his lips a delicate purple, and his eyes watery. With almost no encouragement he began to talk, or rather complain, about the price of vodka.

'Our driver kept us well entertained until we reached the spot where we were to change carriages and drive the remaining twelve miles to our final destination. I had been in this village before, some

two months previously, when I had lodged in a peasant's cottage, but this time the local priest was to put me up. He was the son of a labourer and his living was one of the poorest I have seen in Poland. He had a few meagre acres and a tiny garden, and his parish was very small. Although his earnings were pitiful in common with all those of his cloth he did his best to assist others whose lot was as bad as, or rather worse than, his own. He was indeed keeping a number of refugees, one of whom was an aged priest who had arrived from a distant part of Poland a few months previously. He had turned up without a penny, and had only a few belongings consisting mostly of his church paraphernalia and an awful looking chess board, of which he was immensely proud. I wonder how people in such critical moments choose what they will save? And he did not even play chess!

'Celt and I spent six days in this village whiling away the time in listening to the conversations of the local people. The sound of heavy guns in the distance reminded us that the Russians were approaching, and one morning I saw about fifty American planes in the sky which, as I learned later, were heading for their Russian bases after bombing some towns in Germany.

'One day the peasant with whom I had stayed on my previous visit happened to pass. He saw me in the garden, recognized me, and came across to pay his respects. When I asked if he had any news he calmly and quite naturally replied: "No! It's all been very quiet. Only eight men killed since you were here last!" '

6

The whole pick-up operation was of particular importance from everybody's point of view. For some weeks past headquarters in London had been urging that no effort should be spared and top priority assigned. Such was the urgency and the insistence that, notwithstanding the additional risks involved, it was decided, contrary to all the rules, to use the same landing field as the one where, six weeks before, Retinger failed to take off. There were several reasons for this urgency.

From the British point of view the most pressing was the V2 rocket, parts of which the Polish Underground had managed to capture. For some time past London had known that the Germans had some new, secret and dangerous weapon in store. Throughout the preceding year Hitler had suffered serious reverses in Russia, North Africa and Italy. To raise morale he talked about the devastating secret weapons his scientists were making ready. British leaders took it seriously enough, although they had only a vague idea of what was in store. On 17 August 1943, the RAF carried out a major bombing raid on Peenemunde, gravely damaging the principal German rocket research centre on the Baltic. As a result some of the works were shifted further east and, in January 1944, a stray, unexploded rocket fell into the hands of the Poles. It was hidden, dismantled and detailed drawings and photographs were made of all its components. Now, Captain Chmielewski, of the Polish Home Army, was due to take all this precious material with him to London.

Another important passenger was to be Tomasz Arciszewski, a veteran socialist leader, who was to join the Polish Government in London. For the past year communist propaganda, increasingly supported by some segments of the British press and public opinion, had been accusing the Poles of being reactionary. It was, therefore, particularly important to strengthen the Government by the inclusion of this hero of the 1905 revolutionary movement, who could also be an added proof of the close links between the exiled Government and the occupied country. For this reason the Underground National Council asked that he should be designated as successor to the ailing President Raczkiewicz.

Retinger's brave companion, Marek Celt, was returning with a voluminous mail, reporting on the military strength of the Home Army. Celt has written the following vivid description of the dramatic events on the night of 25 July 1944:

> 'We left Cracow and that same evening were already far from the town, in a small village lying only a few miles from the intended scene of the picking-up operation. The next day I was told that my great bag of mail was already in the village. It had come by another route. Arciszewski, our other companion on the journey, was living in a neighbouring village.
>
> 'Each day, in the afternoon, I went and asked the same question, and each day was given the same answer: the operation was off. Sometimes it was bad weather in Poland, or on the route, or at the base.
>
> 'And our situation was beginning to get complicated locally. The Eastern Front was rapidly approaching this part of Poland. There were always more and more German troops in the neighbourhood. There were enormous round-ups for forced labour on fortifications. Some four miles from the spot where the operation was to take place the Germans started to make a new military airfield. It was finished in less than two days. Every hour German planes landed and took off. They were in the air constantly, mostly transport planes, but also – what mattered more – a few fighters. Then a regiment of German cavalry was quartered in two villages close by. The police posts were strengthened, and Gestapo cars were always busy on the roads.
>
> 'On the 25th of July, I got a different answer.
>
> ' "Tonight it's on. Everything is fixed. The passengers must be ready at eight o'clock."
>
> 'With hands shaking from emotion, I packed my few things, one or two souvenirs from relatives and friends, a few books, and some German newspapers. Then I went out again.
>
> 'In the quiet, empty country church full of flowers and greenery and lit by the beams of the setting sun which slanted through the stained glass windows, I made my confession to the village priest. He also was a member of the Underground, and he was more moved even than I. As he left the church, "God bless you, my son," he said to me; and his voice shook. With his fingers he made the sign of the cross on my forehead. I kissed his hand. And I was left alone. I prayed for a moment, thanking God that the operation was to come off at last and asking that it might be successful.
>
> 'I did not know how to pass the time till evening. Sitting down at the small harmonium I played quietly, my thoughts gradually farther and farther away. The clanging cow-bells as the herd came in from the fields reminded me of the passing of time. Slipping discreetly along the field paths I came home.
>
> 'Presently, two officers of the Home Army arrived.
>
> '"Good evening." Retinger and I both smiled. "We're quite ready."
>
> 'They did not say anything. Their faces were horribly serious. They closed the door and windows carefully and sat down at the table. Then the senior started to speak.
>
> ' "The situation is practically impossible. I am very sorry. And the plane is already on its way. But I see no chance of carrying out the operation successfully. Never mind about the aerodrome; we can deal with that. It is much more serious. This afternoon a German plane landed on our landing field, stayed there for about ten minutes and then took off again. Four hundred Luftwaffe soldiers have been quartered in a village about a mile away. They have about forty heavy machine-guns, twenty lorries and a few smaller cars. The

sentries on the outskirts of the village aren't three quarters of a mile from the field. They couldn't conceivably fail to miss the plane, even if they didn't notice our lights. The cavalry is only two miles away on the other side."

He stopped.

' "What do you suggest, then?" Retinger asked.

'My throat was so constricted that I could not get a word out.

'I felt something like resentment against God. I had been so sure, in the church. Now – would the next chance ever come? The mail, and the other, more important travellers – would they ever reach London?

' "I can't take the decision," the officer said. "I can risk my soldiers lives and my own. But I have no right to risk yours, or the fate of the mail. If there is a fight, and it looks inevitable, I am positive that we shall lose. Each of you must decide for himself. And quickly – if you don't mind. If the operation is on, I must start in half an hour to give my last orders. That is why I came."

'I was desperate. How could I say "Yes"? If I did, my two fellow passengers might lose their lives – and their lives mattered much more than mine – many soldiers would be killed and the mail might fall into the hands of the Gestapo. I was savagely angry with the officer for throwing the responsibility on to us. I had not the slightest idea, at that moment, what to do. Retinger said nothing.

'Night came slowly nearer. The two officers sat drumming with their fingers on the table and looking at us in silence. Our host came in. He brought the paraffin lamp and placed it on the table, cut the wick and lighted it. He drew the curtains and looking all round the room went slowly out again. Suddenly Retinger spoke.

' "There are two questions: if they catch us, shall we have time to destroy the mail? If there is a fight, will the neighbourhood suffer for it later?"

'The senior officer answered instantly.

' "Yes – to your first question – quite sufficient. We can hold them off for twenty minutes, perhaps half an hour. To your second – one can never say for certain. I should not anticipate anything very serious. But in any case, there is a clear rule of the Underground that if work which has to be done involves risk to some civilians – it must be done nevertheless."

'Retinger said, "Carry on."

'Now both officers looked at me. While they had been speaking a vague recollection had come into my mind, and now, I caught it clearly. It was the priest's words: "God bless you, my son." I found myself speaking.

' "My answer, too, is – carry on with the operation. If the terrain allows it you can change the reception field; there is still time. If not – in the old place. The worst danger is the Luftwaffe soldiers. Put most of your men that side. I feel sure the Germans landing there was an accident. The cavalry on the other side of the wood won't find us in time. If the operation goes through quickly we shall be in the air within a few minutes. Then you can fight and run in the dark."

'Retinger nodded, without a word; and the officers rose.

' "Don't worry about us," they said. "We shall be all right. We must ask the other passenger. He matters most. If he agrees, we shall proceed. In that case the horses will come for you at ten o'clock."

'I put out the lamp and opened the window. Lying in my clothes on the sofa I waited in the darkness. Somewhere far away a rifle shot rang out, then a second. The deep bass voice of artillery rolled occasionally in the far distance, as it had been doing all through the last few days. Once I heard the sound of a plane's engines and jumped to my feet.

'Ten o'clock came and passed. I could no longer stay still. I started to walk about the room, stumbling against the furniture. I was trembling from the chilly night air and from nerves. At about a quarter to eleven we heard the noise of wheels. We went out. In the cart we found one fellow passenger and an escort of the Home Army. We exchanged a few words, our hearts filled with joy and hope. Goodbye to our host, and then the road in the dark.

'It was a difficult journey, over rutted tracks and roads full of potholes. Several times we avoided the ditch by inches. Several times we were stopped by Home Army guards. We took a complicated and twisting route to keep clear of all villages and German positions.

'Gathered in a close group on the huge field we whispered together with the Commanding Officer of the reception committee. It was a quarter to twelve.

' "We're less than a mile from the Germans," he said. "We couldn't change the field. The ground is too wet, and there are ditches. The guards are all right. But be as quick as possible getting into the plane. We shan't get away without a fight."

'I looked round in the darkness. The carts had been left near the wood. Near us several sinister shadows appeared and disappeared. I made sure that the mail was there. And my two important companions for the journey, and also two young officers of the Home Army who were going with us, were ready. Retinger was hanging on my arm. We had carried him from the cart.

'The night was perfectly silent – no sound from the Germans, no sound from the sky. Our words were but short whispers. I seemed to live only in my ears.

' "Here he comes!"

' "They're here!"

'The little flock of watchers stirred. The sound of engines was soft, and so distant. It grew and shrank, approached and withdrew. It was lost. And then it came again. I could not tell which was the noise of the wind-stirred trees and which of the plane. Then it came close again, and closer. It increased, increased, and roared. The whistle of the Commanding Officer sounded precisely and on the field around us the lights sprang out like glow-worms. They ringed us in a wide-flung wreath, and across the centre they drew a path for the landing.

'The luminous hands of my watch stood at five minutes to twelve. We were all shaking with emotion. The sound circled above us.

' "He's seen us."

' "There! He's coming in. He's landing!"

'I, too, could make out the plane's shape. And then his two giant searchlights went on. But he is not following the lighted path. He is coming straight for us. In a second he is going to smash the whole group into the ground.

'The man at my side was powerless to move, and I could not leave him. But the others did not stir either. It was all too quick. We seemed struck by a general paralysis of the will. Blinded by the searchlights, deafened by the sound of the motors, fastened to the earth like a field of corn beneath a hailstorm, we remained there. Some of us were lying on the wet grass. It cannot have been more than twenty yards from us that the plane touched the ground. Before my eyes the glancing propellers whirled in the silver searchlights. I could not think. This was the end.

'But it was not. The pilot saw us. The engines bellowed. The wheels

did not touch the earth a second time. With astounding noise the black monster swept up and over our heads. The searchlights went off, and he started to circle again. In loud, rather unnatural voices, we talked of death, which had brushed us so closely. Then:

' "He's trying again."

' "Good, good!"

' "Better this time."

' "Not so much to the right. Yes, left more, left, left!"

'Involuntarily the second-in-command of the committee shouted directions. The machine touched down, taxied along the grass, turned full circle and stood still at the far end of the lighted runway. Its searchlights went off. We ran towards it. A soldier of the Home Army helped me to carry the sick man. As we passed behind the tail, we felt the violence of the slip-stream. The door of the plane was open, and the passengers of the outward trip were emerging. The crew and the Home Army men unloaded the material, passing it from hand to hand and into the carts.

'The engines were still running. We, the new passengers, waited for the order to climb in. One of the crew brushed past me. Yes, I remembered his face from the journey out. In one hand he carried a trowel, and, bending down, he dug with a swift urgent movement at the earth, thrust several clods into an empty mailbag and with it jumped back into the plane.

' "Passenger and mail embark!"

'Once inside, I relaxed. The passengers in my charge were safely there. The mail was all lying on the floor. From outside, through the noise of the motors, came the shouts of "Farewell". I distinguished the voice of the reception committee's commander.

' "Au revoir, in free Poland. And, remember, send us more arms!"

'The door closed violently. The crew passed us and disappeared one after the other into the pilot's cabin. One of them was a New Zealander, and there were two Englishmen and one Pole. As the last went into the cabin he shouted:

' "Hold tight, and don't forget your belts! We're taking off in a moment."

'The motors roared with mounting volume again. The whole plane seemed to be in motion. In a minute it would rush forward and leap into the air. Through the window beside me I watched a soldier of the Home Army standing near the wing with a green torch shining in his hand. I saw the tall grass bending beneath the slip-stream. After a while the light would grow distant and vanish.

'What was happening? The engines were slackening.

'The door of the pilot's cabin was wrenched open. Bounding past us the pilot yelled at the top of his voice:

' "All out! We're going to fire the plane!"

'As we struggled to the door I dragged at the mails, and then thrust out my helpless friend, almost throwing him into the arms of the Home Army soldier below.

' "Passengers and mails to the carts."

'We went, walking slowly over the wet grass. From time to time I turned my head to see if they had started to burn the machine. For a moment I was just curious. How would it look? Then I felt plain fear. What were we going to do with ourselves now? If the Germans had not noticed us up till now, or had not guessed what was going on, the blazing plane would certainly fetch them. We ought to fly at top speed. But my companions could not. One was sick and powerless and the other very old.

'The engines went off. I was praying feverishly, my mouth dry. I did not know for what I was praying; whether to get the mail and my friends away safely into the woods; to take off after all; or to have a machine-gun; but at last it seemed for nothing in particular, only repeating ". . . but deliver us from evil . . . deliver us from evil . . ."

'From the plane someone was shouting. For a moment I did not understand. Then I heard distinctly –

' "Passengers and mail back!"

'We ran. A soldier and myself dragged the invalid. The others were behind us.

' "What is it? What's happening?"

' "Get in! We're taking off!"

' "The wheels were bogged. We've got some planks and straw down. It may go."

'We were inside again, and the door was shut. The engines screamed into life – first one and then the other. They ran for a moment. Are we moving? But the green light is motionless. Oh God! The same thing again. The cabin door opened; but I did not wait for the pilot's words. I was already at the door when they reached me.

' "We're going to fire the machine!"

'This time we did not move far from the plane. They told us to wait. The engines fell silent. Somewhere above us I heard another engine. Drenched with dew and sweat we waited. In front of the wheels, still sunk in the mud, they were digging two narrow ditches.

' "Back! We'll try again."

'I heard the pilot say: "Well, I've cut off the brakes altogether. That may do it."

'Again the door slammed. The commander of the committee shouted once more, as he had already shouted twice,

' "Au revoir, in free Poland. And, remember, send us more arms!"

'What is he screaming for, the fool? Must he shout it every time – if we don't move, anyway? I was so indifferent. I was past caring.

'But when I sat once more on the bench and looked once more through the window at the green light, I was caught suddenly by the excitement of a gambler – should we move, or not? I was emptied by exhaustion, and yet my emotion grew terrible. It seemed to me that my heart was rising in my throat. My face burned and throbbed. It was a dream! I was mad! I was falling off a precipice! Where was the green light? It was going – it was farther, farther! . . .

' "It's moved!" I shouted.

'The plane lurched. It gathered strength. It strained, reached forward and – with a great sigh stretched itself on the air. I looked at my watch. It was half-past one on 26 July 1944.

'For nearly an hour and a half our machine had stood on the ground. It had raped the silence with its roaring engines, and fallen quiet, torn the night with the flaming bands of its searchlights, and grown blind. How had it happened that the Germans had not attacked us? I did not know. I do not know. Were they afraid, or had they thought it was their own? I do not know. But this I did know. Without any doubt at all they had seen us, and heard us.

'Yet until the very moment of our taking off, not one shot had sounded. Not one threatening torch had gleamed in the distance. Perhaps the fight was just starting. This I did not know either. And I do not know now.

'I looked through the windows. Below us it was black. Nothing, absolutely nothing was to be seen. Only darkness. So we tore ourselves away from the soil of Poland, and so I looked a last time upon it. Darkness – that was all. But there were people left down there, men and women who, in spite of this darkness would live and fight, waiting for the dawn.

'We had the wind behind us, and we flew fast. The night around us thinned, grew grey and paled at last. The stars went out like candles in church, one by one. And then the lovely golden sun came up out of the waves of the Adriatic sea, defeating the darkness.

'This was freedom. The power of our great plane carried us forward into it; but those, left behind, they can only wait and shed their blood. We must hurry, for we are short of petrol. And they must hurry also, before too much blood is shed.'

7

And here, for the tail end of the story is Retinger's own description:

> 'We reached the Adriatic at dawn, and our airport at about five o'clock. Here we circled around for some twenty minutes while our pilot and navigator were engaged in a heated conversation with the ground staff about the best way to land, since the brakes were missing. Once again luck was with us. A long new runway was being built and the surface was still rather rough, and our pilot was advised to land there in the hope that the uneven surface would help to stop him. All this, of course, was told to us only afterwards. The plane finally stopped a few yards before the end of the runway where we found two ambulances waiting. Minutes later Polish and British officers came to greet us and we were taken off to breakfast.
>
> 'We were to leave again for England at three o'clock that afternoon, but on getting back to the airfield we were told that we had half an hour to wait, and there I was handed a wire asking me to go to Cairo instead of returning to England. My companions got into the plane, the very same plane which had brought us from Poland, while I was obliged to wait another twenty-four hours in Italy. I spent a most pleasant evening at a British SOE mess in the hills of Southern Italy, where I had the pleasure of learning that none of the friends I had made there four months earlier had met with any mishap during my absence. I have no adequate words of praise for these men, who had not only the daring and inspiration needed for the important work they were doing, but also the clear-sightedness and perseverance which brings success.
>
> 'After a long flight via Tripoli I spent the night with the Americans in Benghazi. The barracks were incredibly bad, the food rotten, and the fact that I was obliged to spend the night there, ill as I was, made me bitterly dislike everyone in the vicinity, and they happened to be all Americans. The following day we flew on to Cairo, and during the flight I was very excited at seeing Tobruk from the air, Tobruk in which I had spent a memorable twenty-four hours during its siege, when I had the privilege of accompanying General Sikorski on his visit to Russia. Only now did I learn why I had been summoned to Cairo. The Polish Prime Minister, Mr Mikolajczyk, accompanied by the Foreign Minister and Mr Grabski, had just arrived on his way to Moscow.'

8

The last volume of Churchill's history of the Second World War bears the title *Triumph and Tragedy*. For the Poles it was mainly tragedy.

Throughout 1943 the declared bone of contention was the Eastern frontier of Poland. Neither the Polish Government in London nor the opinion in the country would give up territories which, though they had a mixed population, had belonged to Poland for centuries. The towns of Lvov in the south and Vilno in the north were virtually shrines of Polish history. Their voluntary surrender would amount to treason. While there was still some hope that the worst could be averted no Polish leader would agree to give them up. Within living memory Poland had come through situations when the chances of success were incomparably less. Now that she had a strong case and powerful allies her leaders could not see why they should give in.

Moreover, the Poles believed in the Atlantic Charter which, they thought, guaranteed the future of their country. Strict adherence to its principles could improve their position, while any departure would toss them into the whirlpool of power politics and cast them into a world divided into 'spheres of influence'. This was another strong reason why a westward shift of frontiers held so little appeal. It meant the loss of a strong moral position in exchange for an arguable advantage, whereas the Poles firmly believed that right and justice gave them protection.

But perhaps the most potent factor was the undeclared fear of Stalin. The treatment meted out to the Poles in the Soviet-occupied part of the country in 1939, the Katyn murders and the hostile attitude of the Soviet authorities towards Poles obedient to the London Government filled them with forebodings.

All along they were subject to strong pressure from the Western

Allies. Echoing Soviet propaganda, large segments of the Anglo-American press, and many parliamentarians, accused the London Poles of being reactionary. Their resistance to Soviet territorial demands was considered foolish and obdurate. Of their other fears there was no mention. The Poles could not speak about it openly and their allies did not wish to contemplate the looming dangers. Both Churchill, who was more directly concerned, and Roosevelt, who was less so, pressed the Polish Government to show an accommodating attitude. The warning of Katyn was disregarded.

At the Teheran Conference, in November 1943, the Big Three agreed that Poland should receive territorial compensation in the West, at Germany's expense, for land it was to lose to Russia in the East. This seemed a fair bargain. As for the rest, the Western Allies were content with Stalin's assurances that he wanted a strong and independent Poland and that he would not interfere in her internal affairs, provided Poland was friendly towards Russia. For the time being this was considered enough.

Both Churchill and Roosevelt, while bringing pressure on Mikolajczyk's Government to accept the new frontiers, were urging Stalin to open talks with the Poles. But since Teheran Stalin had been playing hard to get. His winter offensive was highly successful and by the spring nearly all of Russia was liberated from the Nazis. At the same time the Soviet-sponsored Polish Committee for National Liberation grew in importance. Between the Western Allies on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other, there was a growing discrepancy over Polish affairs. Both sides wished well for the Poles, but it was 'their' Poles they had in mind.

Of course, Stalin always made things difficult for Mikolajczyk and his Government, but Churchill also received his share of rebuffs. Nonetheless in May 1944, contact was re-established and talks started between Mikolajczyk and the Soviet Ambassador in London. In June, Mikolajczyk visited Roosevelt, received his fill of threats and promises and, a month later, set out for Moscow. On his way, in Cairo, he met Retinger freshly flown from Poland, and listened to his tale.

It was unlikely that Retinger, who had been cut off from London for over six months, could offer much advice. But he could give a clear picture of what the people in Poland thought and felt.

On 1 August, while Mikolajczyk was on his way from Cairo to Moscow, the news suddenly came through that Warsaw had risen.

Russian armies were approaching the Vistula. In Warsaw people could clearly hear the Russian guns. During the previous weeks, Soviet radio stations had been calling on the people of the capital to rise in arms. The population could hardly contain themselves and General Bor Komorowski thinking that at any moment the Russians would come, had given the order. Within two days the city was in the hands of the Home Army and, hopeful and elated, it clamoured for arms to be parachuted from the West and for rescue by the approaching Soviet armies in the East. They were to receive neither.

There was little that could be done from the West. Warsaw was too far to fly to with a useful load and return the same night. Sorties were attempted but without fighter cover the losses were crippling. The Polish 301 Bomber Squadron alone, in its operations over Warsaw, was to lose fifteen crews, which was more than its full complement. Useful operations could only be carried on if British and American planes could land on Soviet airfields to refuel. This Stalin flatly refused to allow. A couple of days after the start of the rising the advance of the Soviet armies stopped. Churchill pressed Stalin for help. On 16 August he received a chilling answer, the last paragraph of which said: 'In the situation which has arisen the Soviet Command has come to the conclusion that it must dissociate itself from the Warsaw adventure, as it cannot take either direct or indirect responsibilities for the Warsaw action.' For nearly two months, while Warsaw fought and burned, Stalin stood back and did nothing. On 3 October Warsaw fell. In two months of fighting about fifteen thousand soldiers of the Home Army and over two hundred thousand civilians were killed.

While Warsaw rose Mikolajczyk was in Moscow. This time Stalin's demands included not only frontiers but the dissolution of the London Government, a few of whose members would be allowed to join the Committee of National Liberation. A few weeks previously Stalin had concluded an agreement with this Committee, now installed in Lublin, granting it virtual recognition as the provisional government of Poland. Members of this Committee, moreover, would not join Mikolajczyk in asking Stalin to help Warsaw. As a result nothing was achieved and by mid-August Mikolajczyk was back in London.

Poles in the West were passing through an agonizing period. All the armed forces were engaged at the front. In Italy, Anders' army corps, which earlier on 18 May had conquered the formidable Monte Cassino, was now an important component of the somewhat depleted Allied armies in Italy. In Normandy an armoured division, part of Montgomery's command, fought with distinction at Falaise. The air force and the navy were fully engaged. One can easily imagine what these soldiers felt, helpless in the West, while Warsaw fought and died. Many battles still lay ahead for them while a question mark hung over the purpose of their fight.

Poles everywhere, including the Government, were in disarray. Was there any point in making concessions or would it be better to stay put and let history decide? Both Churchill and Roosevelt were insistent, pressing for concessions. The former was realistic and felt what was coming. The latter believed that 'Uncle Joe', as he kept on calling Stalin, should be trusted and cajoled. Churchill wanted to make another attempt and see for himself. A week after Warsaw fell he was in Moscow and on 12 October, Mikolajczyk joined him. Again all efforts failed. Even so, most of the members of the Polish Government in London felt that Mikolajczyk had gone too far and on 24 November he resigned.

At the end of 1944 the Lublin Committee declared itself a Provisional Government and was promptly recognised by Moscow. And so, when in February 1945, a fortnight after the Soviet Armies finally took Warsaw, the Big Three met at Yalta, two governments were in existence, one recognized by Stalin and the other, now led by Arciszewski – the same who had earlier flown out of Poland with Retinger – by the Western Allies. At Yalta the fate of Poland was virtually sealed. While the new frontiers were agreed upon, a conference of Ambassadors was left to decide the composition of a new Polish Government, which would be recognized by all. In the course of the ensuing months Molotov turned down, one after another, all Western proposals and so nothing was accomplished. While this was going on, the Lublin Government was administering territories liberated from the Nazis.

In the meantime, the Soviet Authorities invited for consultations sixteen of the leaders of the Underground movement, including the Chief Delegate Jankowski. On 27 March 1945, they were arrested. Two months later they were tried and sentenced to imprisonment.

In June 1945, at the San Francisco Conference on the setting up of the United Nations, the question of Poland held everything up. A final attempt was made to break the deadlock and Mikolajczyk, now only leader of the Peasant party, and a few other non-Communist leaders from London and Poland itself were invited to Moscow by the tripartite conference of Ambassadors.

However weak it was, the pressure of the Western Powers was one of the reasons why some arrangements had to be agreed by the Russians. More important, however, was the necessity to find a solution inside Poland. The Poles had emerged from the nightmare of the War with a greater sense of solidarity than ever before. Party political divergencies were insignificant in comparison with the underlying sense of kinship and patriotism. This was true both for those fighting in the West and those inside the country, and for all classes of society. No doubt this was due to the horrors of the War which were equally shared by all. But also some of the reason lay in the particular character of the Polish cultural tradition. While it might be said that the French cultural heritage puts a premium on intelligence and the British on character and moral values, the Polish tradition lays stress on the qualities of the heart. A 'heart of gold' is perhaps the most highly prized human quality, while in arts, politics and religion now, as in the past, sentiments are valued more than reason. This was the source of both strength and weakness. It helped the nation to pull through and survive the most dire trials since it created an exceptionally strong sentimental bond among the people. It also caused them to miss countless opportunities when, as was frequently the case, popular sentiment was in conflict with political interest. And now the single-minded attitude of the country at the end of the War was a formidable factor to contend with. The presence of Mikolajczyk and his friends in the new Government was the essential lever to prise open the frozen attitude of the people.

In pre-war Poland the Communist Party was microscopic. It was further weakened by Stalin, who killed off during the purges of the thirties most of its leaders who had sought refuge in Russia. When Poland was liberated from the Germans it was desperately short of people and had to recruit as fast as it could and virtually at any price. This needed time. A coalition government was essential, though both the Soviets and the Lublin Government wanted the best possible terms. Finally, Mikolajczyk agreed to join and arrived in Warsaw as a junior partner on 27 June 1945. A few days later, on 5 July, the new Polish Government in Warsaw was recognized by the Western Allies, who, at the same time, withdrew their recognition of the London Government.

In the meantime, on 7 May, Germany had surrendered and the War in the West was over. A month later the Big Three, consisting now of Stalin, Truman and Churchill, met at Potsdam. Again Poland was prominent on the agenda. Although it was plain that the Yalta agreements had been broken, Stalin kept on reassuring his partners that they would be honoured. In fact Poland was left on her own. For the next two years or so a hopeless political struggle went on. The Communists inexorably and ruthlessly extended their power and the rigged election of January 1947 virtually eliminated all opposition. In October of that year Mikolajczyk fled the country. Two years later, in 1949, even people like Gomulka, the Communist Party Secretary-General, were to fall the victims of Stalin's machinery of suppression. The same well-known pattern prevailed in other countries of Eastern Europe.

It was necessary to recall, however briefly, this historical background to provide the reader with a context for Retinger's actions during the two years following his return to London at the beginning of August 1944, just at the start of the Warsaw rising.

When he got back to England, Retinger could hardly move. For several months he was bed-ridden and his activities were restricted to seeing visitors, writing letters and making 'phone calls. He tried to be of as much help as possible in the countless cases of distress which began to appear from all sides. As the Nazi tide receded, problems of relief began to pile up, and during the next few years, he did his utmost to intervene, beg, badger and buttonhole to get help and assistance.

There was little he could do politically. When in November 1944 Mikolajczyk resigned and sought an agreement with the Lublin Committee, the Government in exile, led by Arciszewski, took a more resolute stand. It has been aptly described as a Government of national protest. It knew that its struggle was hopeless. Now and again Retinger tried to do something to improve their tenuous links with their British allies, but with little success.

On the Continent, in Italy and in Germany, there was at the beginning of 1945 a considerable Polish army, 210,000 strong. As a result many problems arose. During that time Retinger made a few trips abroad to see for himself. The conclusion of it all was that in the political field there was really nothing of consequence to be done. He set out on a different path, of which he left the following description:

'When the War ended the Poles were divided in their reactions towards the Warsaw Government. The great majority was against, as they thought Poland would shortly be completely Communist and would fall under Russian domination. A small percentage decided to go back. I must add – and here I have a complaint to make – that they were often being persuaded to do so, sometimes, with insistence, by the British, and especially the liaison officers, who used false and I suspect insincere arguments. In some cases they went as far as to say that Poles who wished to stay would not be welcomed in Britain and hinted that their families in Poland would be open to reprisals. Then there was a small number of Poles who adopted a "wait and see" attitude towards the Government in Warsaw. As some leading people, including Mikolajczyk, had joined the Government, they thought it should be given a trial, so much the more as Churchill and Eden, both of whom we respected, held that the elections provided for under the Yalta agreements would be free. Moreover, some of our friends in Poland who had joined the Warsaw Government wholeheartedly, tried to induce us to return, help in the reconstruction of the country and fight it out in the elections to come. I should add here that some of those in Poland have since died and many of them found themselves in jail.

'I myself was among the hesitant ones, but as I had been in Warsaw recently and had seen the tremendous devastation of Poland, the appalling shortages, the destruction of houses, roads, bridges, railways, the lack of food and of every kind of goods, I felt I ought to help my country by trying to get her some essential supplies. For once in my political life I did not bother much about politics, but only about welfare.

'The British Government held a vast amount of war-surplus supplies some of which Poland might buy if they could be had on reasonable terms. In July 1945 I approached my two old friends, Sir Stafford Cripps, who was at that time President of the Board of Trade, and Dr Hugh Dalton, then Chancellor of the Exchequer. Their response went farther than I could possibly have hoped. Sir Stafford said: "Of course we shall do everything we can and expect nothing in return." He turned me over to Lt General Sir Wilfred Lindsell to make a preliminary study of the kind of goods most needed for Poland, and we decided that Bailey and Everall bridges, kitchen and domestic utensils, and above all, clothing, were most urgently required.

'In the meantime, two old friends of mine came from Poland, Edward Drozniak, an expert in economics and finance, and Henryk Kolodziejski. They told me again about the appalling misery in Poland, and thought the Polish authorities would be able to pay a small amount for the supplies if the British Government was willing to help them. However, I saw very soon that the Poles were unable to pay cash, and of course they had no goods to barter with Great Britain. I was therefore obliged to put the case again before Cripps and Dalton who agreed that the goods should be given free. The gift, however, was not to be from Government to Government, but to me personally and I was to be responsible for the selection of the goods and their distribution in Poland. There were several reasons for it. It was to be a purely relief operation outside of UNRRA channels and should be kept apart from any negotiations on outstanding claims between the two Governments. Moreover the political climate for a gift made direct from one Government to another was not propitious. Hugh Dalton then told me that he must have also the approval of the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Treasury, who at that time was Sir Wilfrid Eady. I did not know him, but was warned by my friends that he was one of the sternest and most inflexible men in the Civil Service. I must admit that on that Saturday when he received me for the first time I was rather perturbed about the way I should present my case to him, since in Dalton's eyes he was the final judge as to whether it would be possible to hand over the goods or not.

'I went to Treasury Chambers, where Sir Wilfrid received me alone. He was the type of Civil Servant of whom everyone on the Continent is afraid: tall, with a very accentuated, sharp profile, looking much younger than his age, calm and reflective. His opening phrase, which did not make me feel very cheerful, was: "I know, Retinger, that you are a good man, but I am not going to be influenced by sentiment. Tell me the facts as they are." After a conversation lasting one and a half hours he promised me more than I had expected, and I realized that underneath his cold appearance there was a generous heart. He agreed to give me free all the goods I asked for, according to the choice made by the Polish experts. The costs in England were to be borne by the British Government, while the freight and the expenses of the experts were to be paid by the Polish Government. I should like to add here that in the end the British Government also paid the freight, while the experts either gave their services free or had their expenses paid by me personally. I found one or two experts among the Poles in England, and many came from Poland. A small expert committee was formed in Warsaw, and the

Polish authorities naturally did their best to help in the choice of the goods.

'In the meantime, the Chancellor of the Exchequer tabled a motion in Parliament authorizing expenditure and, since it met with no unfavourable reaction, shipments soon started and we were able to send to Poland British supplies to the tune of about four million pounds. All the bridges during the first three or four years after the War came from Britain, including the bridge in Torun on the Vistula not far from Warsaw, and the bridge in Stettin. The clothing amounted to about one and a half million uniforms, most of them new and the remainder in very good condition. In addition we sent about a hundred and fifty tons of field kitchens and domestic utensils, not to speak of machine tools, for which the Polish authorities had specially asked.

'In connection with this matter I made three trips to Poland, in October and December 1945, and in March 1946, and I saw for myself how desperately my country needed the goods. Here I should like to add that the Poles in England – for instance, General Anders and others – who were opposed to any dealings with the Polish Government – raised no objections whatsoever to this purely philanthropic work. The goods were channelled through the British Embassy in Warsaw and distributed either by the Polish Government, as in the case of the bridges, or by semi-private organizations, in the case of the kitchens, utensils and clothing. The then British Ambassador in Warsaw, Mr Victor Cavendish-Bentick, was an enthusiastic supporter of the scheme and not only his staff but he himself worked hard on this matter.

'So long as the supplies were arriving, the Warsaw officials were all smiles, and I was received as a friend and benefactor. However, when I asked them to thank the British Ambassador they would not do so. On the contrary, they prevented any publicity in Poland which would show that the goods were gifts from Britain. When the Foreign Minister, Mr Modzelewski, came to London to discuss arrangements with the British Government, I introduced him, at his request, to Sir Stafford Cripps and asked him to thank Sir Stafford, at least privately. In the course of the conversation it was evident that he was not going to do this, so I intervened in Polish several times, requesting him very firmly to express his thanks, but he still refused. Incidentally, when I was taking Mr Modzelewski along the long corridors of the House of Commons to Sir Stafford's room I met Ernest Bevin, who said in his very rough way: "I hear that you are bringing these bastards from Warsaw here. I agree that you ought to do your best for your country, but I am sorry that you are in such bad company."

'I asked the Polish authorities a number of times to thank the British Government, and at least to pay their share of the expenses, but they flatly refused. Mr Cavendish-Bentinck told me that as they could not do otherwise, they invited him to the inauguration of the Stettin Bridge, but during the ceremony not a word was said of it's being a gift from Britain.

'When practically all the supplies were either en route or already in Poland I went there for the last time in March 1946, and on that occasion I saw neither smiles nor goodwill. The day I was leaving Warsaw with my chief assistant, Mr Celt, I was told at the last moment that there was no seat on the plane for him, but was assured by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Berman, as well as by the Foreign Minister, Mr Modzelewski, that he would follow on the next plane. In view of this formal assurance I left without misgiving. Celt did not arrive by the next plane, and after a few weeks I learned that after my departure he had been jailed, together with the other experts. I received no reply to my repeated telegrams to Mr Berman, but through the grapevine I heard that Celt was still in prison. After consulting my friends in England, I sent a cable to Mr Molotov, with whom I had had fairly good personal relations in Moscow and later, telling him the story and asking for his friendly invervention in favour of Celt and the others with the Warsaw Government. Molotov evidently succeeded in bringing pressure to bear, for Celt was freed, very soon after my cable. But he was kept under surveillance by the Polish authorities to prevent his return to England, and it was not until two years later that he succeeded in escaping with his wife and child to Austria.

'To end the story I should like to mention that when Celt escaped we tried to get him an entry visa for England. While serving in the Polish Forces under British Command, he had been dropped twice into Poland during the War – the second time with me – he was, after all, a war hero, and when in Poland he played a very big part in the Resistance Movement. But notwithstanding the great efforts of Hugh Dalton, General Sir Colin Gubbins, and Mr Peter Wilkinson from the Foreign Office, we could not obtain for Celt a visa for England.'

After his third trip to Warsaw in March 1946 many of the people with whom Retinger was in touch began to be molested. Some were imprisoned and questioned by the Secret police. 'We did not know at first who he was,' they said, 'but now we do. Retinger is a spy and an Imperialist agent.' It wasn't until 1956 that people from Poland dared to meet him again. Oddly enough, this attitude of the Communist police matched with a corresponding, although unrelated, attitude on the part of some of the die-hard exiles. There, among émigré circles in London many rumours were spread and many scurrilous articles appeared about him. For these people Retinger was too closely associated with the policy of conciliation with the Soviet Union and . . . was suspiciously close to the British. His war-time parachute trip to Poland was a mysterious affair. Wouldn't he be a British secret agent? Perhaps the tool of Churchill? There were many people who believed it, while he never bothered to do anything about it.

Retinger, who was never much concerned with internal politics, was now to withdraw from Polish affairs. He left it to others, and while he kept in touch with many of his personal friends, he only took an interest in social and welfare questions. The General Sikorski Historical Institute, which was to be the depository of most of the war-time archives and souvenirs was naturally very dear to his heart and it was the only Polish organization in which he played a continuously active part. He now turned to wider horizons.

PART FIVE

European Unity

THE Potsdam Summit Conference proved an ominous failure. It settled some of the immediate problems resulting from the occupation of Germany and drew the demarcation line between Soviet and Western occupied territories, but all the more important issues relating to Europe were relegated for further examination by Foreign Ministers. It soon became obvious that whenever the frontier between East and West was uncertain, trouble arose. This was so in Greece, torn by civil war; in Trieste, which was claimed by Tito; in Austria and in Berlin under Four Power occupation.

Nevertheless, at the time of Potsdam America was still prepared to pay a high price for Russian participation in the war against Japan. Truman knew of the successful explosion of the first atomic bomb, but failed to grasp its effects on the War and on the balance of power in the world. Neither did public opinion in the West realize its meaning for quite some time. Indeed for the rest of Stalin's life Western Europe lived in fear of the Soviet Union, notwithstanding America's nuclear superiority.

Churchill was one of the first to sound the alarm. In March 1946, in his famous speech in Fulton he said: 'A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory. Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its Communist international organization intends to do in the immediate future or what are the limits, if any, to their expansive and proselytizing tendencies . . . From Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe – Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia . . . Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy.' These words created a great stir. Churchill expressed what many people felt but did not dare to say. But they also hurt deeply cherished illusions and provoked opposition. One hundred and five Labour MPs signed a motion calling on the Government to disassociate itself publicly from Churchill's speech. This attitude reflected the opinion of a large number of people in Western Europe.

In fact the Soviet threat was only partly military. Western forces were being demobilized, troops wanted to go home, and there was irresistible political pressure for a quick and drastic reduction of the Western military establishment. At the same time, nobody quite knew what was happening in the East. Russian military presence in lands controlled by the Soviet armies was believed to be of massive proportions. This numerical imbalance of forces was to cast a deep shadow over the Western European scene for many years to come. But the main problem was that the key areas of Western Europe were in turmoil. Germany was in ruins, and nobody had any clear idea what to do about it. While its war-time victims demanded reparation, in the immediate future it needed assistance, which America alone could provide, simply to keep its population alive. But though it had to be made politically safe so that it should never be in a position to threaten Europe, it had to be offered an acceptable democratic alternative lest it were to tip into Communism. Italy was in the grip of a constitutional crisis partially resolved by the abdication of King Umberto after a referendum in June 1946. There, the Communist Party, ably led by Togliati, contended for power against the hastily organized, Catholic-inspired, Christian Democrats, under de Gasperi, who, in June 1946, became Prime Minister. In France, at the first election in October 1945 the Communist Party emerged top of the poll but instability was such that two more general elections were necessary in 1946. At the first the Communists slipped into second place but re-emerged as the most powerful party in the second one held in November. General de Gaulle, who had firmly led the country since the liberation, gave up in January 1946, and the way was opened for the Fourth Republic with its merry-go-round of governments. Although Holland and Belgium fared relatively well, the latter was gravely shaken by the constitutional crisis resulting from the position of King Leopold.

Of all the European belligerent countries only Great Britain enjoyed a stable political situation at home. The 1945 elections gave the Labour Party a vast parliamentary majority, and the Socialist Government, its future secure, plunged into a social and economic revolution which was to absorb the bulk of its energies and attention. At the same time it had to grapple with economic problems as severe as those of any other country in Europe. As a result the influence and power of the country abroad was severely reduced.

Throughout Europe the economic situation was disastrous. Financial reserves had evaporated during the War, food and raw materials were critically short, industrial equipment severely depleted, houses, factories and communications networks badly damaged. The problems of reconstruction were of frightening proportions. Right after the War, General de Gaulle inquired how long it would take to make good the damage to the rail, road, waterway networks and harbours, and was told at least twenty years.

While peace ushered in expectations of prosperity and plenty, the realities called for policies of strict austerity. Inflation, shortages, black markets all combined to create social unrest and political instability, while as a result, in the field of foreign trade, governments had to fall back on policies of strict and detailed control and self-sufficiency.

The United Nations Organization, which officially came into existence in October 1945, was supposed to set the pattern of a new world order. But its wings were clipped at birth as the Great Powers, whose collaboration was the pre-condition of its success, were at cross purposes. The Security Council and the General Assembly were more likely to become a diplomatic battlefield than an instrument for World Government, and there was little hope that the organization could become more effective than the old discredited League of Nations. The establishing of a world economic system, however, proceeded more smoothly, simply because the Soviet-led countries withdrew, leaving the United States to tower over the rest. The Bretton Woods agreements confirmed the new rules of the dollar/gold exchange standard and pegged the exchange rate of currencies, while the International Monetary Fund was to act as an embryonic Central Bank. This was later complemented by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade whose mission was to reduce barriers to foreign trade and work towards the distant aim of a unified world market. All this set the stage for an economic development along liberal lines but it was a long time before recovery from the disruption of the War made some progress possible.

The aftermath of war also opened the door for radical changes. The past had taught a bitter lesson, destroyed many illusions and disproved many old formulas. People were ready to listen to new ideas but what they needed most was fresh hope. The idea of European Unity stood a better chance of finding support than ever before. Every country in Europe was conscious of its weakness and its predicament. There was a realization, particularly on the Continent, that the Nation State no longer had the strength nor the dimensions to solve any of its major problems, such as defence and economic development. There was also Germany, hated and feared, which had to be rehabilitated and rebuilt but to whom it was unthinkable to restore full freedom and sovereignty. To all these problems the idea of political and economic unity provided an answer.

To most people, however, such an idea seemed unrealistic. It floated around, was mentioned in speeches and articles; it offered hope and gave rise to enthusiasm, but the big question was: how to make a start? After his unhappy experiences with the new régime in Poland, Retinger was more convinced than ever of the urgency of building up the unity of Europe. Now that the Iron Curtain had begun to descend he saw that his country would only be helped in an indirect way, through the creation of an international order, restoring Europe's power and providing a framework within which Poland could one day find its haven.

He had never believed in the so-called inexorable processes of history. He felt it was the individual who forged history according to his will and his vision. Anybody who could set in motion the process of European Unification and help to make it work might well feel that he was truly helping to change the course of history.

Already during the War a good deal of ground had been laid among the exiled European political leaders in London. The threads now had to be picked up anew. Retinger's particular combination of talents, and weaknesses, was such that he could hardly occupy the centre of the stage. Like an impresario he needed others to be the stars of the show. He himself was cast for the role of the *éminence grise*, the man behind the scene, a role in which he was extremely effective.

He stimulated other people, guided them and helped them to achieve what he himself wanted. I was always fascinated by his technique. He was at his best in a *tête-à-tête* over a meal or a drink. Retinger's ideas often seemed hazy and patchy, many things were hinted at, there were gaps, and the formulas he used were seldom quite right. However, it was all stimulating and intriguing. It left room for the other person to invent his own definitions, to complete with his own suggestions, to add and to discard, and finally to espouse the end product of it all as his own idea.

Ambassador Pietro Quaroni recalled it as follows:

> 'I shall never forget the way he approached me.
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> 'The two of us had been dining very pleasantly – he appreciated good cooking – and he was now leaning slightly in his armchair, his cane between his legs, a cigarette in his mouth and a nice big glass of whisky in front of him. His long, gnarled, nervous hands moved fitfully from his stick to his glass, to his cigarette and to his sparse hair that might, in former years, have been luxuriant. I could never picture Retinger as a young man.
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> 'I soon gathered what he was driving at, but it amused me to watch his technique at work, and I resolved, for once, to play the part of the diplomat who was reluctant to understand or commit himself. I must admit that, from the professional angle, his strategy was outstanding. A Pole once remarked to me, many years ago: "Every Pole has conspiracy in his blood." First came very vague hints concerning desirable aims; then, as I gradually caught on, a few details, and then, measuring them out knowingly, he revealed some further details, then a few names . . .'

This short reminiscence faithfully portrayed Retinger in action, in the kind of situation in which he was at his best. But in order to succeed, it is not enough to be able to convince. Above all one has to inspire confidence and trust. How and why it arises is always difficult to define, but perhaps in the last analysis it depends on the inherent quality of the person, on the strength of his character and convictions, and on the sincerity of his motives. Somehow or other people instinctively feel it in others. 'For the five years of war,' *The Observer* wrote about him in May 1948, 'Retinger intrigued twenty-four hours a day. He was on intimate terms with the leaders of all the European émigré Governments; he kept in close touch with various English politicians in particular with Cripps; he started a small luncheon club for Prime Ministers in exile (it was from this table that the Benelux Union grew); and no one resented this intrigue because Retinger was so obviously disinterested in his own advancement, so passionately interested in the future of every member of the family of European nations . . . It was typical of his self-effacement that when, in 1941, as Polish Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow, he negotiated the Russo-Polish agreement and got thousands of Poles released from Russian prisons, only one English newspaper mentioned his name – and then it was wrongly spelt. His friends were incidentally amused to note that even Russians proved no exception to the rule that one cannot distrust Retinger when he is present, however difficult his motives may be to analyse.'

Retinger had immense self-confidence; he knew his strength and had tested his courage. He was not afraid of physical danger – as he proved by parachuting into occupied Poland – and in his political career he was never afraid of risking his position. He was always playing for the highest stakes. He was also firm in his convictions and beliefs. Honour and duty mattered a great deal and self respect counted for more than prestige.

Now and again this would show in some oblique reference but he did not like to talk much about it. He thought it would best be shown in an indirect way, which he much preferred and indeed practised, believing that the cause, the action or the person one opposes shows up a man's attitude and purpose much more clearly than those things he supports.

Going further he used to impress upon me that one must always be very careful in choosing one's enemies. But then one should not turn against people because of their beliefs but only if their motives are contemptible. Human nature being what it is, however, this is not so simple, but in his case it was all the easier because he was quite unusually free from any rancour.

His convictions strengthened his purpose and drove him on no matter what the obstacles might be. He loved politics and public life and nothing could draw him from it. In his younger days, in the period between the wars, he would not allow his family responsibilities to stand in the way, no matter what troubles and hardships this produced for himself and his wife. Now, again, he was to devote himself wholly to politics, totally indifferent to being virtually penniless. This was a great drawback and it restricted his movements. It could have made him vulnerable if he were at all interested in money. As it was, since he was supremely unconcerned with material advantages for himself, many of his friends – who knew his position – appreciated that he was disinterested and came to his rescue. Without their help he could never have carried on as he did. One of the first to do so was David Astor. When, sometime in 1947, Retinger approached him to ask for help in financing the organization which was later to become the European Movement, Astor refused. He had little faith in either the organization or its aims. But instead, since he believed in Retinger, he made out a covenant so that for the next seven years he would receive £500 a year. This helped him to remain solvent for the critical period to come. Also, Sir Edward Beddington Behrens, one of the most discreetly generous of men, helped him on occasions to round difficult corners. In this way

many vital trips abroad could be made. On the whole, however, to the end of his days, money was always critically short.

The fact that he was a stateless exile without a country or a party to give him at least nominal support was a mixed blessing. In international organizations, on committees, where people are deemed to represent some country or some organization, he could not claim any backing. As long as he was the indispensable promoter, the initiator and organizer his place was assured. But whenever there was need to array a representative group of people, his position was immediately weakened.

Even the Polish community was not very helpful. He had been accused of being somebody or other's 'agent' so many times that few dared to praise him without adding that he was also regarded as 'controversial'. The communists certainly opposed him and sometimes some Americans as well. On the Continent, and particularly in France, where he used to go more frequently than elsewhere, now and again it was rumoured that he was "l'homme des Anglais", while his English friends who knew it couldn't be so, nevertheless sometimes wondered what the real truth was. But fortunately among people who really mattered he had enough staunch and devoted friends.

At the same time the fact that he represented no party and no great country made him even more of a free agent and strengthened his claim to being impartial. It was one of the reasons why he never took a British passport, firmly sticking to his stateless travel document, however inconvenient this was for his travels.

Retinger was not a good organizer and he disliked paper work. He was the antithesis of an efficient bureaucrat and yet he succeeded extremely well in setting up, developing and running all the organizations to which he devoted himself after the War. The principal reason for it lay, I am sure, in his uncanny instinct to choose the right people for whatever task he wanted to be done.

Amongst his notes is the following brief record on the early days of his action for European unity; sketchy as it is, it shows the extraordinary speed and dynamism with which the movement expanded, achieving undreamed of results in the space of only three years. This alone testifies to the feverish activity, the intensity of feeling, and the great skill of the leaders of this enterprise.

> 'In 1946 I felt the time had again come to make a new effort in the direction of the unity of Europe. I made a start by giving a

lecture at the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House on 7 May under the title *European Continent?* A few weeks later I went to Brussels, where I had a long talk with Paul van Zeeland, who agreed with me that we should try to revive the concept of the unity of Europe by applying it first to the economic field. Thus we started the Independent League for Economic Co-operation – a clumsy title, but the word "independent" was intended to convey that we were in no way associated with any government; while "economic co-operation" spoke for itself. We omitted the word "European" because we wanted to have the help of extra-European countries; first of all the United States and Canada, and also Russia, which we saw as a continent in itself. While in Belgium I also talked with Paul-Henri Spaak and Roger Motz, who both concurred in the idea, and that is how the League was started in Brussels in June 1946. Mr van Zeeland, who was not yet in the Government, had a good deal of time to devote to the League and until he later became Foreign Minister was extremely active, travelling round, contacting people and promoting our ideas.

'Neither van Zeeland nor I had to alter any of our views on Europe, but in those days of feverish political activity, both in the domestic and international fields, we thought it better to limit ourselves to practical suggestions on economic matters. In fact at that time, not only were conditions chaotic, but there was a complete dearth of ideas as to how to overcome economic difficulties. There was as yet no Marshall Plan and Europe was critically short of raw materials and food and could not afford to buy them from overseas. But we never considered the unity of Europe, especially in the economic field, as being limited to the Western part of Europe. We believed, and I think rightly, that the solution to aim at should be such that both Western and Eastern Europe could co-operate for the economic welfare of the Continent. We tried to establish sections of the League in every European country we could reach. From Brussels I went to The Hague, and here again, my Dutch friends, and especially Senator Pieter Kerstens, gave us their full support and at once started to organize the Dutch Section of the League.

'Coming back to London I consulted my old friend, Major General Sir Colin Gubbins, who by that time had left the Army and joined industry. He too proved enthusiastic and helped me to start the League in Britain. Although later he himself never took a very active part, he always gave good advice and helped with practical matters. He suggested, for instance, that I approach Sir Harold Butler, former Director of the International Labour Office and later Minister in Washington, who had just retired and had a good deal of spare time. Sir Colin also put me in touch with Edward Beddington Behrens. He had been a brilliant young officer in the First World War and, after a spell at the International Labour Office, became a well-known industrialist and financier. Among others who joined the League in London were Leslie Hore-Belisha, Harry Price, Harold Macmillan, Peter Thorneycroft, Henry Hopkinson (now Lord Colyton) and Roy Harrod.

'As for France, we thought the best man to approach would be Daniel Serruys. As a young man he had worked with Clemenceau and had been Secretary of the French Delegation at the Congress of Versailles. Later he negotiated many important international economic and financial agreements. When I saw him in 1946 he had already retired from Government service and was on the board of the great chemical firm of St Gobain and the Chairman of the Union Economique et Douanière formed many years before the War to promote free trade in Europe. Paul van Zeeland, a friend of Serruys, had written to tell him of my visit and I was very glad when Serruys mentioned at the start that he had recently written a pamphlet on French economics laying great stress on some form of economic unity in Europe. He too joined us without hesitation.

'At that time Serruys was already quite an old man, with a distinguished appearance, an amazing memory, and an extraordinary facility of speech. He knew everybody in the Western economic world and, notwithstanding his dictatorial manner, he managed to interest many important people in our ideas, and brought into the French Section of the League François Poncet, Michel Debré, Fould, Lacour Gayet, Etienne Giscard d'Estaing, Christian Monnier, André Voisin and André Noël.

'Mr van Zeeland arranged for the setting up of the Luxembourg Section, under the chairmanship of Mr Guill Konsbruck. He also took in hand Italy, and obtained the support of Ugo La Malfa. Later I also went to Italy and found much goodwill on the part of the Government, but nothing was really done for quite some time until the late Senator Enrico Falck took an active interest and formed the Italian Section of the League.

'We also tried, but without success, to organize a Section in Portugal. Our efforts in Switzerland also failed. In Austria, however, and later in Sweden, Sections were organized. For obvious political reasons we did not think it wise at that stage to try to organize a German Section. It was not until the Congress of Europe at The Hague in May 1948 that we began seriously to think about it. Later, under the leadership of Herr Hermann Abs, the German Section greatly contributed to the work of the League.

'I also went to Czechoslovakia and had talks with Jan Masaryk, but although he was strongly in favour of the idea he could not act without the knowledge and approval of the Kremlin.

'One of our first tasks was to write a letter to all the Foreign Ministers of Europe telling them of our organization and its aims. As a rule we received most encouraging replies, although in some cases they were obviously merely dictated by courtesy. Our letters were also sent to the Soviet Foreign Minister and to the Foreign ministers of the newly-formed Eastern European Popular Republics adhering to the Soviet Union. To ensure our letter being delivered to Mr Molotov, the then Soviet Foreign Minister, I gave it to the Soviet Ambassador in Paris, Mr Bogomolov, whom I knew well when he was Soviet Ambassador to the Polish Government before diplomatic relations were broken, and with whom I had made the trip from Archangel to Scotland in 1941. We had no reply from the Russians.

'In November 1946, I had a very long talk with Mr Averell Harriman, American Ambassador in London, who showed the same keenness I had found among my European friends. He helped to arrange a trip to the United States and gave me the best possible advice. As a stateless Pole I naturally had difficulties in getting an American visa, but Averell Harriman was my sponsor and arranged my visit. He strongly believed in European unification and as Secretary of Commerce and later head of the European Co-operation Administration was responsible for the tremendous support the United States gave to this idea.

'At that time (the end of 1946) I found in America a unanimous approval for our ideas among financiers, businessmen and politicians. Mr Leffingwell, senior partner in J. P. Morgan's, Nelson and David Rockefeller, Alfred Sloan, Chairman of the Dodge Motor Company, Charles Hook, President of the American Rolling Mills Company, Sir William Wiseman, partner in Kuhn Loeb, George Franklin, and especially my old friend, Adolf Berle Jr, were all in favour, and Berle agreed to lead the American Section.

'John Foster Dulles also agreed to help us and when he went to Moscow early in 1947 to attend a Conference we asked him – since we had had no reply from Molotov – to ascertain how the Russians would react to the idea. Dulles wrote back saying very bluntly that he had studied the Russians and that they were all for the unity of Europe on condition that it would be united under Russia. Later on, whenever we needed any assistance for the European Movement, Dulles was among those in America who helped us most.

'A few months later, in March 1947, a meeting of the League was held in New York, which I attended with van Zeeland, Franz Leemans, Konsbruck and Kerstens. But after the Marshall Plan had been announced our American friends thought it preferable to concentrate their efforts on the American scene, and we in Europe, after a few months' experience, decided to confine our activities to Western Europe.

'By the beginning of 1947 the League was firmly established. Meetings were held in Paris, London and Brussels and were well attended. Many useful studies were made and our voice began to be heard.

'While we were forging ahead with our plans for the economic co-operation of Europe, three political organizations emerged on the scene. Mr Churchill made his famous speech in Zurich on the unity of Europe on 19 September 1946, and some months later the United Europe Movement was set up by Mr Duncan Sandys in collaboration with Lord Layton, the Reverend Gordon Lang and many prominent, mainly Conservative, politicians. Then there was the Union of European Federalists which held its first Congress in the summer of 1947 in Amsterdam. Finally Count Richard Coudenhove Kalergi came back to Europe from the States and started to organise the Inter-parliamentary Union.

'Then in June 1947 George Marshall made his speech at Harvard, putting forward a plan which took his name.

'These other movements for the unity of Europe were of great interest to us, and we decided that I should approach the United Europe Movement and the Federalists to see how we could all co-operate. So, early in 1947, on behalf of the League I went to see Duncan Sandys who, together with Reverend Gordon Lang, was

Honorary Secretary of the United Europe Movement. I had only seen Sandys once or twice during the War, and remembered nothing about him except his red hair. I told him what we thought about co-ordinating the different Movements and he at once expressed full agreement. There and then we decided to call a small conference in Paris of the four existing organizations, and at the same time to approach the Nouvelles Equipes Internationales which was just being formed. The NEI was a Christian, or rather Catholic, organization which, in theory at least, was concerned with the whole world. We asked them to create a special section for Europe. In fact, however, the NEI confined its activities to Europe, and there was no need to do so.

'Again, quite a lot of travelling had to be done in order to see various people, until finally on 20 July, we held a meeting in Paris with the representatives of the other movements and decided to create the Committee for the Co-ordination of the International Movements for European Unity. I should add that in the meantime Duncan Sandys, through his indomitable energy, succeeded in creating the *Conseil Français pour l'Unité Européenne*, which was a replica in France of the British Movement in London, with René Courtin at its head. Although the relationship between the League and both the United Europe Movement and the Conseil Français was most cordial and intimate from the outset, the same could not be said for the European Union of Federalists or for Count Coudenhove Kalergi's Movement. There were no difficulties with the Nouvelles Equipes Internationales because they were still in process of formation.

'The European Union of Federalists was supposed to be a mass movement whose principal aim was propaganda. Its members were much younger than those in the other movements, and as they had no experience or political responsibility they tried to forge ahead far more quickly than the rest of us.

'Count Coudenhove Kalergi's position was different. He had organized his Pan-European Movement twenty or thirty years previously and had helped Briand launch his plan for European collaboration. He had every right to be considered as a pioneer of European Unity, and notwithstanding other circumstances, he wanted to be treated as such. We had the greatest respect for his past, but we thought his share ought to be the same as that of other participating Movements. He accepted several times to participate in the Co-ordinating Committee, but each time after a few weeks or even a few days he retracted.

'At the beginning of September 1947 I went with Duncan Sandys to the meeting of the Interparliamentary Union of Coudenhove Kalergi in Gstaad, while ten days before we attended a big Federalist Conference in Montreux, at which Henry Hopkinson, Denis de Rougemont and several others made brilliant and constructive speeches. During this conference I spent most of the time with Duncan Sandys, and finally we clearly saw how to develop the Co-ordinating Committee and how to launch a large-scale campaign.

'So far as ways and means of starting such a campaign were concerned three possibilities seemed open. One was to call a large-scale international congress for the unity of Europe. I remember talking with Sandys at Montreux the whole of one night about our future plans. We decided for the time being to devote all our resources to preparing such a Congress of Europe. I don't recall which one of us first hit on the idea, but from the outset we were in complete agreement. Otherwise we thought it would be necessary to enlist as many supporters among the younger generation as possible, but this was not realized until several years later. Finally we toyed with the idea of organizing a petition throughout Europe – more or less on the lines of the Peace Pledge in England some years before the War. This Peace Pledge had been a very important means of propaganda, and we often spoke of starting something similar, but each time we were obstructed by lack of funds. This was our main difficulty.

'Then in December 1947 our Committee assumed the title of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity, while Duncan Sandys and myself were elected respectively Executive Chairman and Honorary Secretary. We then decided to organize the big Congress we had in mind and shortly afterwards we finally agreed that the best place to hold it would be at The Hague.

'The preparation of the Congress of Europe was very difficult. We wanted to have a monster international gathering independent of any government and of any political party, and to get the most European minded, the most famous and the most representative participants. But rivalries were hard to avoid and, moreover, it was naturally difficult to gather seven hundred and fifty people – the number we had in mind – willing to spend a week of their time on work which, although we thought it most important, did not in some cases seem so to them. Our Movement had few national branches at that time who could give us any help. We were therefore largely obliged to rely on the personal contacts of Duncan Sandys and myself, while the advice we received, although proferred with the best of intentions, was not always very sound. Here I must say that so far as France, Belgium and Holland were concerned, our friends in those countries were of the greatest help, but when it came to other countries we generally had to use our own judgement and make arrangements ourselves. All this entailed not only an extremely extensive correspondence with persons who, in many cases, were unknown to us, but also personal visits by Duncan Sandys and myself to several hundred people. As time went by we found it more and more difficult to refuse invitations to persons whose names had been put forward but whom we did not consider suitable. After we had arrived at The Hague it fell to me to refuse admittance to some would-be delegates. One day, within half an hour, there arrived a delegation from Franco's Spain, which we had already decided to exclude, as well as a Republican leader from the time of the Civil War, who had come from Marrakesh and to whom I was also obliged to refuse admittance, though for quite different reasons.

'As usual, the question of funds was a burning one. It must be remembered that in 1948, few politicians in Europe had the means to pay for such a trip, and even in the case of those who had, the difficulty of getting foreign currency had to be overcome. We were therefore obliged to pay the greater part of their travelling expenses. Moreover, the reservation of rooms for seven hundred and fifty, exclusive of journalists, was a gigantic task, and needed an enormous amount of money as well as an efficient organization. The Hague was still short of lodgings and many of the delegates had to go as far as twenty-five miles out of the town to find accommodation. However, they did not mind that nor the other difficulties. The Congress cost us well over forty thousand pounds. The raising of money, as well as the organizing work in Holland, was undertaken by Senator Pieter Kerstens, who was most ably assisted by Mr J. C. Kaas Sypersteyn, a prominent industrialist, and Mr C. Vishil, a Dutch businessman who, I remember, had no sleep for five nights. Between them, but thanks mainly to the untiring efforts of Pieter Kerstens, they raised thirty-six thousand pounds, the balance being provided mostly by the United Europe Movement.'

2

I shall interrupt Retinger's story at this point to mention the attitude of the British Labour Government to the Congress of Europe. It created by far the biggest political problem its organizers had to face. While the attitude of most Western Governments was sympathetic and at worst lukewarm, in Britain it was openly and actively hostile. This unfortunate decision was to set the Labour Government on an anti-European course which it kept up as long as it was in power. Britain lost the unique opportunity it had of assuming the leadership of Europe to which victory in the War gave it the title and the means.

The reader will recall how, during the War, the Allied Governments exiled in London talked about their post-war co-operation. General Sikorski often spoke about it to Churchill who supported such ideas. In a broadcast on 22 March 1943 Churchill himself said: 'One can imagine, that under a world institution embodying or representing the United Nations there should come into being a Council of Europe. We must try to make this Council of Europe into a really effective league, with all the strongest forces woven into its texture, with a High Court to adjust disputes, and with armed forces, national or international or both, held ready to enforce the decisions and to prevent renewed aggression and the preparation of future wars. This Council, when created, must eventually embrace the whole of Europe, and all the main branches of the European family must some day be partners in it.'

Britain, the head and centre of the Commonwealth, would be part of this Council of Europe, but how far she would commit herself to it was by no means clear. In any case Churchill got little response to his broadcast and nothing much was heard about it until September 1946 when he made his famous speech in Zurich calling on European countries to unite. Other speeches followed and, as the reader will recall, the United Europe Movement was formed in England early in 1947. It joined forces with other organizations and helped to prepare the Congress of the Hague. On the British side all this effort was dominated by Churchill while the organization was in the hands of his son-in-law Duncan Sandys. As a result it was *de facto* run by Conservatives who were then in opposition. Unlike the Socialists, whose leaders were in the Government, they had more prominent people available to work and could talk more freely. The Labour Party was, therefore, at a disadvantage and many of its members felt resentful. Some of them saw Churchill's campaign as an attempt to give a progressive image to the Conservative Party and build up its publicity in view of the next elections. In the end such views swayed the attitude of the Labour Government.

This might seem the more surprising as many socialists, including some of the principal leaders, were personally in favour of the idea. Sometime during the War, Attlee said that 'Europe must federate or perish'. While Ambassador to Moscow Sir Stafford Cripps started to write a book advocating European Unity. Many others – such as Hugh Dalton – were sympathetic, but it was the attitude of the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, which, while being decisive, was also the most ambiguous. Since taking office he had promptly and realistically appraised the situation in Europe and shed any illusions he might have had about Soviet policy. He realized that the Russian threat and Western Europe's instability, weakness and destitution necessitated a great effort at co-operation on the part of the Western Governments. Only by joining forces could they hope to cope with their predicaments. Bevin often spoke about it and in January 1948, following the failure of yet another Four Power Conference (in December 1947) he declared himself in favour 'of the concept of the Unity of Europe' believing that 'the time is ripe for the consolidation of Western Europe'. There was an immediate response to these words on the Continent and Spaak, Count Sforza and Bidault, the Foreign Ministers of Belgium, Italy and France gave their full backing for such a policy. In the months that followed, important practical steps were taken. These included the conclusion of a military alliance, the Brussels Pact, on 17 March, and the opening of discussions between France and Italy with a view to establishing a customs union.

It therefore seemed the more incongruous that Bevin should turn against the supporters of policies which he pursued himself. Yet partisanship proved stronger. Already at the beginning of 1948 it became apparent that the proposal to organize a big European Congress was finding little favour with the Labour leadership and as weeks went by this attitude began to harden. In February Churchill wrote to Attlee saying there was a wide measure of support for the conference on the Continent and that prominent socialist leaders in other countries had agreed to attend. Attlee replied in a non-committal way, referring the matter to Shinwell as Chairman of the National Executive of the Party.

A few days later Shinwell wrote to Churchill saying that the Executive had reaffirmed its decision to discourage members of the Labour Party from participating in the proposed Congress. He added: 'It is felt that the subject of European Unity is much too important to be entrusted to unrepresentative interests, and the proposed composition of the Congress seems to us open to objection, in particular because the number of private individuals selected by an unknown process robs the Congress of any real representative character.' Churchill again appealed to Attlee and, a few weeks later so did Retinger, as Secretary-General of the International Organization, but it was all of no avail.

At the end of March there was a meeting of the Socialist International in Surrey attended by the delegates of the thirteen parties from the countries participating in the Marshall Plan. Guy Mollet, on behalf of the French socialists, proposed to start a big campaign before The Hague Congress, in favour of European Unity to mobilize socialist opinion in Europe and give a socialist direction to this Movement. He was defeated by the British side who asked for another meeting 'to determine policy and co-ordinate efforts towards a United States of Europe'. This took place at the beginning of April in Paris. While the French leader Léon Blum pressed the Labour Party to attend The Hague as other democratic parties had said they would, the British socialists not only maintained their attitude but tried to dissuade others from going. In this they did not succeed and the other socialist parties sent important and numerous delegations to The Hague.

Many reasons were given for this hostile attitude. It was said that Labour did not wish to mix with non-socialists, and that they would not join in building a United Europe unless it was socialist dominated. This was a somewhat arrogant and unrealistic view, which the Continental socialists, used as they were to coalition governments, could neither understand nor accept. Some observers, like Walter Lippmann, argued that the reason for Labour's opposition was that 'when a government undertakes to plan and direct the economic life of a nation it is drawing very heavily on the sovereign power of the national state. Inevitably it will cling jealously to that sovereign power: since it cannot let private interests at home, it certainly cannot let foreign Governments abroad interfere with its planning and its direction of the national economy'. In those days when many people still pinned their hopes on planning, this argument certainly carried some weight. However, the more likely, if seldom admitted, reason was jealousy of Churchill and the Conservatives who had captured a good idea, and were gaining all the credit for it.

This became plain during an incident recalled by Retinger:

> 'Prior to the Congress of Europe at The Hague, I had a long talk with the Foreign Secretary, Mr Ernest Bevin, whose foreign policy at that time still had Churchill's complete support. I tried to persuade him to induce the Labour Party to give us their backing, but during this two-hour conversation the only argument he put forward against joining the Movement was the fact that Churchill was its official leader in Great Britain. Churchill was a political opponent, and the Labour Party could not support its political opponent. Mr Bevin said, among other things, that naturally the personality of Winston would dominate the Hague Congress, and when I suggested that Sir Stafford Cripps should take part (as he was willing to do), in order to counteract Churchill's personal influence, Bevin pooh-poohed the idea. I then suggested that he himself should go to The Hague, but he confessed frankly that he was not of sufficient stature in Europe to be a counter-balance to the immense popularity of Winston Churchill.
>
> 'For this reason, when some months later Lady Churchill told me that in a private talk with her Bevin had said that one of the many reasons why he would not allow his people to take part in The Hague Congress was because of me, I felt, on the one hand astonished, and on the other flattered that Bevin considered me to be of so much importance. This conversation was afterwards repeated to me several times by Mr Churchill, who minced no words in recalling it!'

Nevertheless in spite of it all some twenty-seven Labour Parliamentarians including Kim Mackay, Gordon Lang, John and Henry Hynd, Richard Stokes and Hugh Delargy went to The Hague in defiance of their Whips and were duly reprimanded on their return, while the Government, drawn by the logic of its attitude, took a negative view of the recommendation of the Congress. Retinger's notes continue:

> 'The Hague Congress was a tremendous success. Among the eight hundred or so delegates were eighteen ex-Prime Ministers and twenty-eight ex-Foreign Ministers. Never in my long experience of public life have I seen such an imposing gathering. Important people volunteered to come and spend their time working out practical proposals for implementing this new idea. They did not know what the reaction of the public would be; many of them did not know what would be the reaction of their governments or of their respective parties. Many of them realized that because of the positions they held they were taking on an enormous responsibility. They could derive no special glory from it since they were too many for any one of them to claim much credit, and they therefore had to work more or less anonymously.
>
> 'The Congress lasted from the 8th to 10 May, and an enormous volume of work had to be crowded into that short period. One Commission, the Economic, presided over by Mr van Zeeland, sat twice in succession until six o'clock in the morning; the Political Commission, presided over by Mr Ramadier, spent night after night arguing about our programme and our aims and in its midst the greatest battles were fought; while the Cultural Commission, chaired by Don Salvador de Madariaga, also worked late hours setting forth a series of proposals, most of which have since been implemented.
>
> 'Throughout the Congress, in the plenary meetings and in the commissions, one felt the enthusiasm of the participants, their infectious zeal and their recognition of the importance of the occasion. They spared no effort to give of their best and the oratory often reached great heights. The tone was set, right at the beginning, by the brilliant speech of Churchill, while among the many memorable speeches which followed I still like to recall that of Don Salvador de Madariaga, one of his best ever, calling for the growth of a European mentality.
>
> 'The Congress received enormous publicity and the participants, once dispersed, added to it further and confirmed its impact. As a result the idea of European Unity was strikingly brought to the attention of public opinion.
>
> 'I did not always see eye to eye with Duncan Sandys, but I must admit that he was superb at the Congress, displaying his organizing talent, energy, tenacity and, for once, admirable tact! I admired the wisdom of Winston Churchill and his untiring efforts to press home his points and to make the Congress a success. I was very grateful to Her Royal Highness Princess Juliana, now Queen of the Netherlands, for her kindness and for the help and good advice she and her husband, Prince Bernhard, gave us so freely.
>
> 'The Congress expressed the unanimous desire to create a United

6. Retinger and Paul-Henri Spaak, 1951

our ideas. Within two days we had presented a memorandum to Ramadier which was largely the work of Duncan Sandys. The same day, making practically no changes, Ramadier laid it before a full meeting of the French Government, which accepted it and took the initiative of proposing it to the Governments of Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. This was all done in a hurry and Paul-Henri Spaak, who was resting in Biarritz, could not be kept fully informed. However, we telephoned him and told him that the French Government intended to accept our proposals. He then agreed to leave it with them as it would be easier for France than for Belgium to take the initiative and make the idea a success.

'Then followed a period of feverish activity on our part. At the end of October, the Foreign Ministers of the five countries met and decided to form a Study Commission under the chairmanship of Edouard Herriot. Its members included such prominent supporters of our Movement as Léon Blum, Paul Reynaud, François de Menthon for France, Max Busset, Auguste de Schryven, Fernand Dehousse for Belgium, Pieter Kerstens, Bruyns Slot for Holland, Fernand Loesch and Michel Rasquin for Luxembourg, while the British delegation, led by Hugh Dalton, included Sir Gladwyn Jebb (now Lord Gladwyn), Lord Inverchapel and Sir Edward Bridges.

'The Commission was due to meet in Paris at the beginning of December and a few days prior to the meeting, in a talk with Hugh Dalton, I suggested that it would be helpful if people met and had an informal talk beforehand. Consequently I organized a luncheon for the heads of the delegations at Lapérouse in Paris, which I nearly missed myself as London Airport was fog-bound and only with great difficulty did I manage to get on the night train to Paris!

'The lunch went very well and proved quite useful. While the French, Belgian and Dutch fully adopted our ideas for a European Parliamentary Assembly, the British Government's view was that it was unnecessary to give a say to parliamentarians, and even possibly dangerous, and that it was sufficient to set up a Ministerial Council so that European Unification should be firmly under government control. That is why I thought it would be helpful if a friendly atmosphere prevailed among the delegates right from the start of these difficult negotiations. In this we succeeded and I left with a feeling of optimism in the outcome of the big battles that lay ahead.

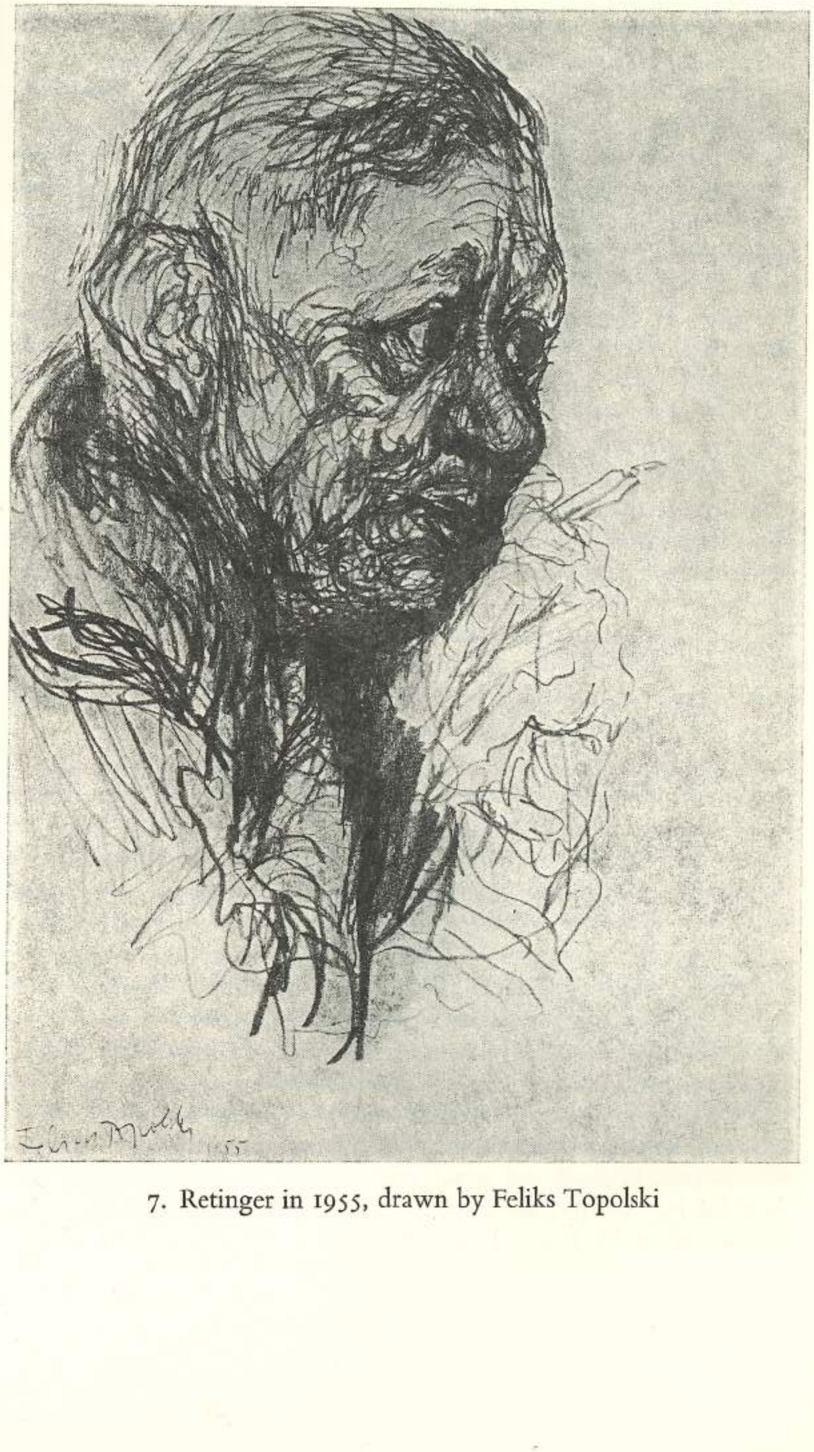
'The Commission produced a report endorsing our views, on which the British delegates only abstained, instead of voting against as we feared they might do. This document was in turn examined by a Conference of Foreign Ministers in January 1949, which marked some progress as Britain came closer to the Continental view. Further meetings followed, with the participation of other European countries, while all along we followed events very closely, presenting memoranda and lobbying the Governments to ensure the acceptance of our views. Finally, on 5 May a treaty establishing the Council of Europe, the main object of the Hague Congress, was concluded in London.'

3

I joined Retinger shortly after the Congress of the Hague. He asked me to stay with him and so for the next twelve years I shared his daily life, with one interruption when for over two years I moved to Paris, though even then I continued working with him.

He was the easiest companion to live with. Within a matter of days my friends became his friends, while my parents accepted him as one of the family. All this happened imperceptibly, as a matter of course. All the barriers which differences of age, position or the formalities of the language might make, dissolved because his manner was so exceptionally direct and sincere. At the same time proprieties were always preserved and in Polish, which we of course all spoke, the customary formal form of address was always kept, although softened and familiarized by the great variety of phrasing which the language permits. Thus, till the end we addressed each other as 'pan', the equivalent of 'Mr', as in Polish it is rather exceptional to be on Christian name terms with people of a different age group. Even with my parents it took many years before he started calling them by their Christian names, and they in turn began using the many affectionate and familiar diminutives used by his friends: Recio, Jozio, sometimes Jussuf, were the most frequent, while in English it was usually Ret. All this was in complete contrast to the greater familiarity of manners with English and especially American people, with whose habits he naturally conformed, and who sometimes use Christian names right after the first handshake.

At the same time he opened to me his circle of friends and as years went by also his political friends and acquaintances, introducing me invariably as a junior colleague who, although he had, of course, a lot to learn, at least was already enrolled.



7. Retinger in 1955, drawn by Feliks Topolski

He dressed very modestly and did not pay much attention to his looks – claiming that old and infirm as he was it did not matter very much how well his suits were tailored or even pressed. He never had more than three suits and for years only two, though these I remember came from famous tailors, which showed that things had once been different. Even his inseparable walking stick was of the roughest kind and at home he simply wore a sleeveless sheepskin which added to the oddity of his silhouette.

He lived very simply in a succession of furnished flats and never seemed to be very much concerned with his surroundings, which often were very plain indeed. A hard chair by a table, underneath a harsh ceiling light were quite sufficient and he could sit there for hours, reading, talking and entertaining whomever came to see him. In the half a dozen or so different apartments we moved into over the years, he never bothered to change or decorate anything; yet he had a keen appreciation of beauty, knew a lot about art and had a well formed and discerning taste. Only music was completely beyond him and he would often jokingly complain that he could hardly distinguish one anthem from another. But then it might be that this lack of concern for his surroundings was, like the lack of concern for his looks, a sign of creeping old age. This certainly must have conditioned many of the aspects of his character during the period I worked with him, and I often regretted that I never knew him in his prime.

He travelled through life unburdened by possessions. At the time I joined him his total possessions were a sizeable library, some papers which he kept to serve for his memoirs but which he could never be bothered to sort out, a handful of photographs and a few drawings by his artist friends which he gladly gave away for the asking. This did not strike me at first as particularly unusual, accustomed as I was to fellow exiles, most of whom emerged from the War with only the minimum of personal effects. He was in the same position as everybody else and it seemed quite normal. I was surprised, however, to discover after a few weeks that he did not even have a bank account. This, in fact, turned out to be unnecessary as the little he had he could well keep in his wallet. He was rather proud never to have had one and was quite determined to keep things that way. Several years later, however, when I was moving to Paris and could no longer cash the odd cheque that came his way nor pay the bills, I accompanied him to a bank to open an account in his name. I well remember the puzzled look of the

manager, who could hardly believe it was his first ever, and which grew even greater when he gave as his references the names of the Chairman of the very bank, a Cabinet Minister and a well-known millionaire.

Lone bachelor that he was, inventing far-reaching projects, playing an unusual and delicate game on the political chessboard, he naturally needed someone to confide in, to speak to of his hopes and plans, to tell the odd or amusing incidents he came across and sometimes also – why not – to boast a little. It was great fun and often quite exciting. Coming back from a trip or a meeting, he would immediately recount, *al fresco*, details from his conversation and every important move, noting every psychological nuance, which greatly added to the interest and piquancy of the story.

Many things delighted him and nothing more than a mischievious repartee, an irreverent pun, or a jab at somebody's secret soft spot. 'You are no Treasurer! You're just a book-keeper!' he once threw with great glee at a multi-millionaire, who never contributed a penny to the organization of which he was Treasurer and kept complaining that others didn't do so either. Or once to Churchill, who was being heaped with praise at a dinner in Strasbourg, following a Council of Europe meeting – 'Ah, but you are not human – you are just a phenomenon of nature!' And as the great man's smile vanished, as he turned round to thunder back, Retinger interjected 'like the Niagara Falls' which, taken as a compliment, restored Churchill's contented grin.

The oddity of his situation was a constant source of amusement. A penniless exile, hobnobbing with the great of this world, and getting them to follow his advice, adopt his suggestions and join with him in all sorts of ventures, the limits of which they sometimes only dimly perceived. Usually this happened in the most natural way; after all he had a good title and a good reason to act as he did. Only on a few occasions, circumstances combined to illuminate it in a flash. One day, in the mid-fifties, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands arranged for him to meet the Duke of Edinburgh. It was during a more than usually lean period and Retinger was living in a small basement flat in Chelsea. Early in the evening, when darkness fell, a taxi was called to take him to his appointment and with some difficulty Retinger groped his way up the dingy basement steps. 'Take me to Buckingham Palace,' he grunted. 'But it's too dark for sightseeing now, Guv!' said the cab driver and he took a lot of persuading that it was the main entrance he should really drive into.

Seeing Retinger, his baggy suit, his unassuming looks and knowing his bohemian habits and the circumstances of his life, it was difficult to imagine the importance of his connections and his work. He neither looked nor behaved the part. And yet he not only knew everybody in high places but appeared to be in constant touch. It created a little aura of mystery, which he rather enjoyed, never denying anything either good or bad which people had to say about him. And of course all sorts of things were rumoured. 'Tell me, Joseph,' asked Denis de Rougemont one day, 'people say you are a Free Mason, an agent of the Intelligence Service, and of the C.I.A., and of the Vatican and also a fellow traveller. They sometimes even add that you are a Jew and a pederast. Is that true? What am I to say?' 'Well, well,' chuckled Retinger, 'say it's far from being all!'

He travelled a lot and knew all the hotels and the best restaurants. Seeing the well-known faces of his visitors or his table companions he was treated with respect and in turn became well-known. Sometimes it amused him and I remember the puckish grin with which he used to take people to a small but excellent Paris bistro, explaining that there at last he was given his due because they always called him 'Monsieur le Président'.

He liked good food, but what he loved above all else was to entertain. He liked both to take people out to places they would enjoy and to receive at home. There of course it was much more modest, but he was very generous, particularly with drinks. He liked young company and was delighted whenever any of my friends came round. As my predecessors used to tell me this was always so, and particularly during the War when he kept practically an open house for his secretaries, his friends and friends of friends. The entertaining at home was necessarily restricted to a few people at a time, but once in a while he liked to give a little party for his Polish friends who would not mind the homely arrangements. The first and biggest happened at Christmas 1949, when my parents came over from Paris bringing with them all sorts of precious foods which were unobtainable in London where meat rationing was still in force.

A luncheon party was organized on Boxing Day for some twenty people and we all worked to prepare the cold buffet. Retinger was busy from early in the morning, shuffling around, trudging up and down the stairs, poking into every pan and into every jar, happy as Pooh with all the preparations. Everything went very well and the occasion stuck in my mind because of an incident which gave us some pleasure.

The meal was practically over and coffee was being served, when I noticed, alone by a small table, the very portly and benign figure of a prominent exiled Pole who had just finished his last morsel. He was carefully wiping his moustache and I saw the usual jolly twinkle in his eyes give way to a somewhat anxious expression.

'Tell me, John,' he said when I bent over to enquire, 'was there any soup?'

'No,' I said, 'unfortunately not this time.'

'Oh, that's all right – I was just afraid I might have missed it.'

A few moments later I saw him standing in front of the buffet laid out for the occasion on a grand piano shoved in a corner, reviewing the colourful scene. I could read his thoughts. The pink ham – yes, he'd had it, and the turkey as well, and the hare pâté, my mother's speciality, was also excellent; then the rich selection of Polish sausages, unobtainable in London at that time – had been particularly pleasing, while there on the right was some Russian salad which he thought quite enjoyable – and another kind of salad, rather intriguing to the palate – the fresh mayonnaise, and a pink Cumberland sauce – yes, all this he recognized and approved. But lo! there in the far corner was something he could not remember.

'John!' – he beckoned to me – 'and what is that?'

'It's some fish dish,' I said, 'my mother's done it herself and it's very good.''

'Ah, Ah, – well, well, I'll have a little pause and I'll eat some later.'

And with these remarks, which I later repeated, he endeared himself to Retinger who, although a small eater, shared his fondness for good food.

Such occasions, however, were few. Most of the entertaining was done outside. Earlier, Retinger described how in his student days in Paris he used to spend his nights moving from café to café, and this zest for restaurants, bars and lively places remained with him all his life.

He was at his best in a small convivial company, propped at a table with a drink in front of him, puffing endless cigarettes which he held in a peculiar way between the thumb and the index finger. That's what he liked best. There was something immensely captivating about his somewhat monkeyish face with its broad, friendly grin and his alert big brown eyes popping out from behind the old-fashioned pince-nez. He could listen as well as talk and always had some ready barb or witticism with which to prod his companions. Whether one liked him or not, he was stimulating company; he could irritate, amuse or please, but never bore.

Somehow or other most of the talks that led somewhere took place during a meal or over a drink. This is, of course, not unusual but it was particularly in keeping with his taste and suited best his ways and his style. Denis de Rougemont recalled: 'During a meeting of the Bilderberg Group, at cocktail time, I remarked to Bob Boothby,* referring to Retinger who was wandering from one group to the next: "I think I've found the key to his method; he sits alone at a small table, orders a brandy and soda and the idea occurs to him to gather together a certain number of people. He explains to each that his idea is so important that it had better be kept dark. Then he assembles everybody in a nice room, goes back to his little table, orders a brandy and soda, and awaits further developments." Boothby immediately repeated the story to Retinger, who was delighted with it.' To many of the people who knew him, the picture of Retinger, which the mind recalls most readily and vividly, the one that seems most typical of his silhouette, is of Retinger propped at a table with a drink before him, exactly as Feliks Topolski's pen caught him one day during the Congress of The Hague.

Frail as he appeared to be, shuffling unsteadily, leaning heavily on his stick, he was nevertheless extremely resilient and could call on unsuspected reserves of energy. He never seemed tired if the occasion called for alertness on his part. Nor did he ever seem the least affected by drink. Indeed although he could keep in step with the hardest drinkers and never refused a glass, drinking was in his case a purely social affair and he never touched anything when he was alone.

The reader might sometimes wonder what satisfaction Retinger derived from all he did? What was it that he found most rewarding? In fact, what drove him on?

The story of his life provides most of the answers. But there was also the overwhelming, exhilarating sense of creation. Every new idea, every new scheme which he conceived, launched and nursed to maturity and fulfilment was an experience worth any amount of privation. Every new venture called forth all of Retinger's great capacity for enthusiasm and passionate involvement.

Naturally he also appreciated it in others; sought it and stimulated it whenever he found it. He was superb at inspiring people. This tremendous capacity for enthusiasm kept his spirit young. Throughout the years I was with him I watched him grow physically old, weighed down by gradually increasing infirmities. What he deprecated most in old age was that the driving passion and excitement of creation was gradually losing its edge.

That is why he was so good with younger people and liked their company so much. To them – and I was one – he was great fun and a wonderful companion, with a gift for infinite understanding and immediate communication. He could talk, encourage and advise as an equal. Like many people he also liked to pass on certain precepts, teach certain ways of approaching people and affairs, and many younger men like myself learned from him a great deal.

He liked people; nothing interested him more. He involved himself in their personal problems, in their feelings and their hopes. He had that extremely rare gift, which women sometimes possess, of unerring intuition. He understood people in an uncanny way and seldom made a mistake. That was, in fact, the secret of his success. It explains the deftness with which he chose men. In the European Movement and its numerous offshoots and later in the Bilderberg Group it was of great importance to find the right sort of people, and Retinger had the immense gift of spotting talent. He created the teams on which, in turn, the strength of the organization depended.

Following the Congress of The Hague the main objective was the setting up of the Council of Europe. This was the first step, to be taken by governments, from which all further progress was expected to stem. And indeed for the next three or four years the Council of Europe became the centre of debates and the main arena where political battles were fought. At the same time public opinion in all the participating countries had to be won over and ideas and plans formulated to speed up progress along the lines originally laid down.

This meant that the organization of the movement had to be strengthened, expanded, and its activities increased as much as conditions permitted. After The Hague, both Sandys and Retinger worked frantically on all those problems, and meetings and travels followed one another. There were great opportunities which had to be quickly exploited. Success brought confidence and optimism. Everything seemed possible. Europe was still in the melting pot, it had to be rebuilt, and people were ready to listen.

Those who bore the message of a United Europe felt themselves to be true revolutionaries, but revolutionaries who were not out to destroy but to rebuild afresh. Indeed they spoke a completely new language. They were fellow Europeans and not only Britishers, Frenchmen or Italians. They treated Germans as they treated one another which at that time was both novel and courageous. They brought a fresh and totally different approach to the problems besetting their people, opting for solutions which were best for the whole of Europe rather than seeking a compromise between the interests of each. This more than anything else gripped the minds and the hearts of countless thousands who flocked to the mushrooming organizations who were preaching the new faith.

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* Lord Boothby

In such conditions the Movement developed rapidly. In October 1948, the name was changed to that of the European Movement, which it has kept ever since. Winston Churchill, Paul-Henri Spaak, Léon Blum and Alcide de Gasperi became Presidents of Honour. Churchill and Blum agreed immediately and so did Spaak although he was Prime Minister at that time. They were all closely associated with this work, but de Gasperi followed developments from afar and one did not know whether, as Prime Minister, he would wish to commit himself in support of an organization he did not know much about. Retinger went to see him and, as he later told me, de Gasperi seemed non-committal. Then at a certain moment he looked hesitant. 'You and I,' quickly interjected Retinger, 'were both subjects of good old Emperor Franz Joseph. Come, let us now join forces and conspire together.' De Gasperi laughed and the ice was broken. He agreed, and from then onward never ceased to give the Movement his whole-hearted support. In the following years Retinger was a frequent visitor of his.

In February 1949, the Movement called a big Conference in Brussels to define its political aims and approve its new structure. This now consisted of national councils set up in every country, composed of prominent personalities, and the leaders of the national sections of the various movements which set it up in the first place, including the socialist movement for the United States of Europe, which now decided to join. Similar councils were formed for the countries of Eastern Europe, now cut off by the Iron Curtain, and for Spain. In all these cases, they were composed of politicians who were now in exile.

The councils, as well as the Movements, were linked at the top through an International Council, one hundred and fifty strong, whose first Chairman was Léon Jouhaux. Retinger knew him of old but had only a moderate liking for the man. His speeches varied little and were liberally interspersed with the same predictable platitudes. I remember during a conference, after Jouhaux had made his inaugural speech, Retinger approached him with a malicious glint in his eye and said 'The more often I listen to your speech the more I like it.'

In addition to the International Council there was a smaller Executive Bureau under the chairmanship of Duncan Sandys. Retinger was re-elected Honorary Secretary-General, while André Philip became Delegate General, which showed that a Frenchman and a Socialist was associated with the running of the Movement.

The historic Hague Congress laid the broad outlines of the policy of European unification. These had now to be developed and spelled out in greater detail. A series of conferences began to be organized, each devoted to a particular subject. They also provided opportunities to involve new people and new circles.

First came Brussels in February 1949, which was concerned with politics and organization. Two months later there was Westminster, a large conference on economic policy, again a resounding success. The creation of a Common Market was put forward as the long term objective, while a host of other immediately applicable proposals were voted. This was followed in December by a conference in Lausanne on cultural matters. Don Salvador de Madariaga, Denis de Rougemont and Raymond Silva were its prime movers and principal organizers. A great number of resolutions were passed calling among others for the setting up of the European Cultural Centre, a post-graduate College of Europe and a European Centre of Nuclear Research, all of which were subsequently implemented. In June 1950, came the Conference on Social Policy in Rome, and in September 1951 a conference in Hamburg on Germany's place in Europe. Four months later there was another conference, in Westminster, on the countries of Eastern Europe.

In a recent article Denis de Rougemont aptly described this campaign of congresses: 'Historians may argue that the congresses achieved nothing – and indeed we do not normally expect congresses to achieve much. Members of the same profession meet together to sit through tedious sessions and enjoy themselves all the better afterwards. But in those days a strange driving passion, unknown to this generation, inspired the militants of Europeanism, and induced them to prefer the nightly labours of commissions to receptions and operas. It is the sense of this driving passion which must be communicated if we are to convey the psychological and historical reality of the campaign of congresses and pay tribute to the influence it exerted. Their action should not be considered as that of a General seizing a military position, a law-giver imposing a legal structure, or even a medicine effecting a cure. Rather, should it be regarded as a concentration of psychic and psychological factors which prepare the ground and enable the organism to reabsorb certain poisons, overcome certain inhibitions and liberate new energies. It is such profound metamorphoses which really deserve the name of revolution.'

The International Conferences served many purposes. First of all they spelled out policies and created publicity. In those early days when the foundations of Europe were being laid, new paths had to be charted and everything had to be invented. There were practically no precedents and no previous experience to go by. Nor did people have much knowledge of one another. On the Continent, as a result of the War, new people had emerged on the political scene. Hence these conferences, as well as the innumerable meetings which preceded them, were pioneering ventures. For those who took part it was an exhilarating, if sometimes exhausting task. There was also some drama, as the realists clashed with the maximalists. The former thought in terms of realistic objectives which governments might be persuaded to adopt, while the latter sought endorsement for simple and far-reaching slogans apt to stimulate popular campaigns. Since, however, for some three years after the Congress of The Hague there was fast progress and governments were helpful, the realists could substantiate their arguments and claim a larger share of attention. The maximalists, mainly led by the Federalists, were losing out. But by then the opportunities that existed in the late forties for a large scale mass action gradually diminished.

Apart from this policy-making and opinion-forming function the congresses also served to draw into the orbit of the Movement a vast array of people, organizations and forces outside of the field of politics, whose immediate influence was perhaps less strong but probably more lasting. That was the Europe of the people rather than the Europe of the Chancelleries. It was certainly one of the most important factors of success. It also helped the organization of the Movement to develop as widely as it did and survive the inevitable difficulties occurring in the life of private organizations.

Retinger attached great importance to it, for it was in keeping with his understanding of the processes of history. Religious, cultural, economic and social forces are more stable than the often ephemeral political ones and in the long run equally, if not more, effective in shaping the course of events.

Retinger concurred with Arnold Toynbee's conception of history. Religions exert a paramount influence of the life of civilizations. To have religious forces on one's side is in the long run of very great importance. Hence from the beginning of the Movement an attempt was made to enlist the support of the Churches. At The Hague, the Papal Nuncio was present and subsequently Monsignor (now Cardinal) Cento became for a time a member of the International Council. Dignitaries of the Protestant Churches also took an active part. The Reverend Gordon Lang was from the start Honorary Secretary of the United Europe Movement, the British organization founded by Churchill. All this added strength and also much needed respectability to a movement which was new and fighting old and venerable prejudices.

There was also much talk of building the future on the basis of Christian principles. Many of the European leaders drew from their Christian convictions inspiration and ardour in their work for European Unity. Retinger shared this attitude and consistently sought to give a philosophical and moral basis to the Movement which would be imbued with Christian precepts and which would have the support of the Churches.

He discussed these notions with Paul van Zeeland and with his help sought to define them and somehow graft them on to the growing European Ideology. But it was difficult to find ways of implementing such necessarily vague ideas. Nevertheless he kept turning it in his mind and the result was a daring and well executed move which, although it ultimately failed, illustrates Retinger's ways better than most.

The starting point was the need to enlist the joint support of both the Catholic and Protestant Churches for European Unity. Perhaps they could also co-operate together to affirm certain of its aspects which were in keeping with the tradition of Christendom. In addition this would help matters in Britain, where there was a real if diffused feeling that somehow or other involvement with the Continent meant involvement with Rome. It was important to dispel these hidden fears and prejudices. Moreover Retinger came to the conclusion that the time was ripe for a rapprochement between Rome and the Protestant world. In

1949 they were as far apart as ever. Though one could assume, given a good deal of optimism, that ecumenism was the way of the future, at that time it was not a practical proposition. In any case the great question was how to go about it. It would be necessary thought Retinger to bring together the highest authorities of the Catholic and Protestant world. At either end the chances of a successful direct approach at the top were virtually nil. Such an initiative coming just from him might be taken amiss; proper introduction was needed and the ground had to be carefully prepared.

The first practical step was a talk with Sir Stafford Cripps, then Chancellor of the Exchequer. Sir Stafford, jointly with Lord Halifax, was a patron of Christian Action, and a very leading layman of the Church of England. He was influential, respected and above reproach. He suggested that Retinger should talk with Canon John Collins, Dean of St Paul's and Chairman of Christian Action. Canon Collins, a man with an original and independent mind and possessed with great courage, of which he has since given ample proof, readily agreed to enter into the scheme.

The approach to the Vatican was a more difficult proposition. Fortunately Retinger found that there was a man who could help. This was Dr Luigi Gedda, an intimate friend of, and medical adviser to, Pope Pius XII and head of the powerful Azione Cattolica, at that time the power behind the ruling Christian Democratic Party. Retinger did not know him but an introduction was easily arranged. They met, dined and established an immediate rapport. Gedda agreed to give Retinger his full support. He agreed to talk to the Pope and prepare the ground at the Curia. They arranged that Canon Collins and Retinger should come to Rome for the first round of talks.

The visit took place in May 1950. Behind Gedda on the Vatican side stood the Substitute Secretary of State – Monsignor Montini – the present Pope Paul IV. Very few other people knew of the meeting as the utmost discretion was necessary. It was hoped that once the ideas were clarified and the respective attitudes explored, some practical proposal could be laid before Dr Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Should he give his support, other Protestant leaders would certainly follow.

The talks went better than anybody had dared to expect. A common doctrinal ground was tentatively defined and possibilities of joint action explored. In all this there was a strong ecumenical spirit unheard of in those days. The Pope was kept informed throughout and it was arranged that another visit should take place two months later, when he would receive Canon Collins and Retinger privately.

Retinger came back to London jubilant. During the following two months he was so full of holy thoughts that, now and again, quite irreverently, I teased him about it. More work was done and a few months later he and Canon Collins set out on their second trip to Rome. But whereas before all the doors had been open and everybody most forthcoming, now there was an inexplicable change. People were evasive and nothing could be done. Further talks were discouraged.

Retinger came back completely puzzled and the project was abandoned. He never found out what went wrong. It was only a year or so after he died that Canon Collins learned about it from Dr Fisher himself. The Archbishop got wind that something was going on and intimated that the Vatican would be ill-advised to encourage it any further. Several years later the Archbishop was himself to call on the Pope. Whether in 1950, with this in mind, he simply did not wish anybody to interfere we shall probably never know, nor does it matter a great deal. Retinger often used to say that one ought so to conduct oneself in life as to benefit even from failures. This was particularly necessary in politics where most actions turn out differently than originally envisaged. It was certainly so in this particular case, as Dr Gedda later gave him a good deal of help in Italy.

More successful was another project started by Retinger shortly afterwards. Many people within the Movement wanted a mass campaign. Back in 1947 Retinger and Sandys had toyed with the idea of mobilizing young people in favour of the European Idea, but following the Congress of The Hague and the creation of the Council of Europe, conferences and organizational matters had priority which absorbed energies and used up the limited funds. Europe was impoverished and money was difficult to find.

On the other hand the American Government suddenly found itself with ample funds in European currencies, as a result of being able to use a certain proportion of the so-called counterpart funds arising from Marshall aid. In Germany, the education of the young generation was their great concern. Similar problems existed elsewhere. Perhaps, thought Retinger, American money could be harnessed for the good of the cause. John McCloy was then American High Commissioner in Germany, and on his staff was Shepperd Stone, who was dealing with such problems. Robert Murphy, an old friend and supporter of the

European Idea, was American Ambassador in Brussels. Their response was unhesitating and prompt. Mr Spaak, who was at that time Chairman of the Movement, was also in favour and, after a round of talks, everything was settled. Ample funds were put at the disposal of the Movement who set out to organize in all European Countries a vast Youth Campaign in favour of greater European Unity. The United States were to provide the finances over several years, with the understanding that they would be gradually replaced with European ones. As it was, the Campaign lasted for some six years and, although it could claim many achievements, after the initial expansion it gradually contracted since very little money could be found in Europe. The initial American endowment proved a handicap as far as money-raising was concerned. It encouraged hopes – or excuses, as the case may be – that, somehow or other, Uncle Sam will provide.

Two other projects started by the Movement were close to Retinger's heart. One of them was the European Cultural Centre at Geneva, led by Denis de Rougemont and Raymond Silva. They were both close friends and so was Don Salvador de Madariaga who played a leading part on the Cultural side of the Movement's activities. Retinger liked them all very much and attached great importance to this work. He seldom missed a meeting and tried to help in every way he could. The other was the College of Europe in Bruges which provided a yearly course of European affairs to post-graduate students. It owed its existence to the untiring energy of Professor Hendrik Brugmans, a dedicated lifelong Federalist. The College is now firmly based and enjoys a high reputation. It sows seeds which will be apparent in years to come. This appealed to Retinger, who always thought in terms of decades.

Then, of course, there was Poland and the other countries of Eastern Europe. By the time of The Hague Congress they had all become Soviet satellites. Czechoslovakia held out longer than others and its leaders were invited to take part. The final communist takeover took place in February 1948, and at The Hague, at the beginning of May, all of these countries could be represented only by their exiled leaders. Their admittance was not an easy matter. Communist propaganda described them as reactionaries and many people, particularly of the left, still gave Stalin the benefit of the doubt. Duncan Sandys, however, strongly supported by Retinger, arranged that they should be invited, and many prominent leaders such as Mikolajczyk and Raczynski from Poland, Gafencu from Rumania, Ripka from Czechoslovakia, Dimitrov

from Bulgaria, Paul Auer from Hungary, as well as many others, including some from the small Baltic countries, took an active part. Their presence was meant to show that the future United Europe would always be open to these countries should they be free to join.

Months later, in Brussels, this position was reaffirmed. The Movement began to set up National Committees, formed among the exiles, for each of these countries. Nevertheless, Retinger thought that something more could be done to help the exiles to have closer links with Western leaders and unite them around a central theme. But, above all, one had to put before the people of these countries a constructive idea. The Unity of Europe, however distant it might appear for those behind the Curtain, was in every respect ideal for the purpose.

By then the Movement had created three international Sections or Commissions, Economic, Cultural and Juridical, which prepared the European Charter of Human Rights. Retinger set out to explore the possibility of creating a commission for Eastern Europe. A luncheon was arranged with Randolph Churchill, Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens and five or six East Europeans who were in London. All were enthusiastic, particularly Sir Edward, who suggested the drafting of a declaration explaining how the European idea would apply to Eastern Europe. We set to work immediately. Meetings followed in quick succession and, while the document was gradually taking shape, an organization was being formed. Harold Macmillan accepted the Chairmanship, Sir Edward became the Rapporteur, while I was appointed Secretary. Some of the principal exiles who were in Europe at the time were invited to join as well as a few leading Western politicians, including Julian Amery, Clement Davies and Arthur Greenwood from Britain, Ernest Pezet, Paul Reynaud and Paul Ramadier from France and Koos Vorrink from Holland.

When the Assembly of the Council of Europe first met in Strasbourg in August 1949 we were anxious that some gesture be made to mark the fact that the absent countries would not be forgotten. Somebody suggested placing empty chairs in the precinct of the Assembly, but, as the premises were temporary and there was not much room, it was feared that the sublime might turn into the ridiculous, should anybody sit on them inadvertently, and the idea was dropped. Instead, many delegates mentioned these countries in their speeches. In the following year Mr Macmillan proposed the formation by the Consultative Assembly of a Special Committee to watch over the interests of the countries not represented in the Council of Europe. Both the proposal and the title were accepted while its author was elected Chairman. It was composed of parliamentarians, members of the Assembly, while the exiles could have access to it, and were called for hearings. This committee still exists. Throughout the years it has been a symbol and a reminder. One day it might perhaps be called upon to play an important role, in keeping with the evolution in progress in that part of Europe.

Meanwhile the Commission of the European Movement was active on its own. The situation in Eastern Europe had deteriorated; all opposition had been destroyed and the Stalinist terror had begun to gnaw at the Communist parties themselves; mock trials, purges, imprisonments were happening everywhere. In 1950 the Korean War broke out. The Cold War was at its height.

The European Movement through a succession of conferences covered all the major aspects of the policy of European Unification. Now Eastern Europe was to complete the canvas. The preparation took much time and much effort. The exiles had to be brought together, which was sometimes difficult as many had settled in America, and, moreover, there was a certain amount of disunity among them. In Western countries, although many people recognized that the cause was just and deserving, few were prepared to do anything about it. It was also difficult to find the necessary funds. Finally the conference took place in January 1952.

By that time Macmillan had joined the Government as Minister of Housing and Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens became Chairman of the Commission. It was largely due to his enthusiasm and drive that the conference took place at all. It was skilfully chaired by Leo Amery; the number and quality of the participants was impressive, and the debates were lively and constructive. It lasted three days and culminated in a rally at the Albert Hall in which about seven thousand people took part. The discreet support of the Government was arranged for by Macmillan, who opened the conference and spoke at a dinner organized by Sir Edward. In all, these meetings were reckoned to be a great success.

Retinger was not a good public speaker, had no liking for it and only spoke at committees but seldom to larger audiences. At the Brussels Conference, when the officers of the Movement were formally elected, each one of them made a speech. When Retinger's turn came, an assistant rushed the microphone to the end of the podium where he was sitting but arrived too late. Retinger stood up, said 'Thank you' and

sat down. The Eastern European Conference was the only other occasion in the whole history of the Movement when he actually made a formal speech and, even so, it lasted less than four minutes. In it he stressed that the purpose of all our work was neither aggressive nor negative but peaceful and constructive. He called upon the exiles to work together and support the idea of European Unity.

But he intervened in debates in a far more effective manner. The way he managed to influence proceedings was sometimes quite uncanny. I saw him at work in countless meetings. Now and again, having adjusted his pince-nez and sorted out his walking stick and his cigarette, he eased himself from the end of the podium where he usually sat and shuffled to some participant to pass on his message. Something was whispered and a nod or two showed that the point was taken. At some meetings his forays were extremely frequent and I watched amazed at how roundly such debates developed. I could see how some arguments were either dropped or stated just at the right time, how people were encouraged to speak or to keep silent. Sometimes they even changed their minds and expressed opposite views.

Several months after the conference the Commission was given a new chairman and a new rapporteur. It soon became apparent that the new officers were more inclined to restrict than to develop its activities. Following a stormy meeting, both Retinger and I resigned, and after a while so did our opponents who presumably thought they had better things to do. Retinger set out to recreate the organization and persuaded Senator de la Vallée Poussin from Belgium, an immensely likeable and respected man, to take on the burden. Since that time the Commission has done much valuable work. Though its tasks and its aims were often unrewarding and difficult, with no quick results and little credit for those involved, there was some kind of poetic justice, some benevolent providence which saw to it that all the Western politicians who became associated with it and who were eligible for high office, were rewarded with important appointments in their respective countries.

But throughout these years the centre of all the attention and the focus of all the hopes was of course the newly created Council of Europe. Its first inaugural session began in Strasbourg on 8 August 1949, amid great excitement and some drama. The town was bedecked with flags, among which flew the prominently displayed and numerous flags of the European Movement – a green E sign on a white background – which showed the interest and sympathy of the people of

Strasbourg. The whole of this ancient and colourful city had an air of festivity and expectation. The gathering of nearly two hundred famous and important men, ministers and parliamentarians was most impressive. Among the delegates of some twelve countries (neither Germany nor Austria were as yet members) were some of the most distinguished leaders of every party, among whom Churchill held a position apart. They all came to stay there for a month, and indeed many competed for the privilege, foregoing their summer holidays, and once in Strasbourg thought nothing of working at night or through week-ends, so great was their involvement and their sense of urgency. When today, in quieter times, it is quite exceptional for people to gather over a week-end, let alone during the holiday period, we can measure how much more intense were the feelings prevailing in those days.

The Council of Europe was conceived as an institutional first step which might in time lead to some kind of supranational Government of Europe. It was composed of a Committee of Ministers, a parliamentary Consultative Assembly and an independent Secretariat – the prefiguration of a Government, Parliament and Civil Service. The speedy progress achieved since the idea was first launched, barely sixteen months before, the favourable international situation, and the enthusiasm of most of the delegates combined to give substance to the hopes that a New Europe was being born.

Right from the start there was a moment of suspense. The Consultative Assembly was to elect its Bureau – a kind of Steering Committee – composed of its President and four Vice-Presidents. At that moment a government crisis occurred in Belgium where the Socialist Government fell and the Christian Democrats came to power. It meant that Paul-Henri Spaak was available for election. A statesman of great renown, representing a small country, a convinced European and a staunch supporter of the European Movement which immediately began canvassing in his favour, he was the ideal choice for the Presidency of the Assembly. As general agreement was reached the elections were postponed for a day to allow him to reach Strasbourg.

The next day he was unanimously elected but trouble then arose over the choice of the British Vice-President. The Labour Party put forward the name of Mr Whiteley who, as Government Chief Whip, was also a member of the Government. It was a clumsy move. The Assembly knew that it would have to fight with governments and didn't want to elect leaders who would have a double allegiance. Hence there were misgivings and Churchill and the Conservatives proposed instead a Liberal, Lord Layton. The British delegation was thus divided and although many delegates disliked the thought of slighting the Labour Party, Lord Layton was elected with a small majority. For the Labour Party it was a bad start.

The elections over, the Assembly immediately joined battle with the Committee of Ministers over the right to formulate its own agenda and its own rules. Many of the Ministers, including the Chairman of the Committee, Paul van Zeeland, who succeeded Spaak as Belgian Foreign Minister, were in favour of giving free rein to the Assembly, but they had to contend with the powerful influence of Ernest Bevin who disliked having a European Assembly independent of any government control. After some argument the matter was satisfactorily settled and the Assembly started to map out the political, economic, social, juridical and cultural policies and measures which would lead to the rapid unification of Europe. A few weeks later, before it adjourned on 8 September, an impressive number of important proposals had been studied by the various committees and approved by the Assembly at its plenary meetings.

In all this the European Movement played a crucial part. Indeed it was well placed to do so. Nearly all the key functions in the Assembly were held by its members. Among the 185 delegates and substitute delegates, 99 were in one way or another members of the Movement. They had the advantage of previous experience of people and problems. Moreover the Movement had done all the preparatory spade work and knew what it wanted. Within the innumerable meetings and congresses held during the past two years, within the various organizations, commissions and committees a great many ideas were studied, developed and canvassed. This was the case both as regards major proposals and small details.

Everything concerning the first session of the Assembly had to be invented or improvised. The Movement wanted the Assembly to look and act as a true Parliament of Europe, pending the day it could have the powers of one. Had there been divergent intentions, endless clashes would have paralyzed proceedings and poisoned the atmosphere. As it was, everybody's efforts tended in the same direction and the first session proved extremely successful. On 26 August Spaak could declare: 'The most hesitant, the most sceptical must acknowledge the fact that from now on there exists a European consciousness. Men who came from twelve different countries, Conservatives, Liberals and Socialists, many of whom have never met, and some scarcely heard one another's names, have succeeded in creating out of this Assembly, with hardly any clashes, not some kind of ineffectual academy, but a true parliament, and this because the need for it is such that it can no longer be resisted.' This was no exaggeration. In addition, the Assembly had the enthusiasms and the will to forge ahead with the construction of a United Europe. It also was under the impression it had the means to do so.

Throughout the session, both Duncan Sandys and Retinger worked extremely hard. There were meetings and manifestations. On the 12 August some twenty-five thousand people gathered on the main square of Strasbourg to hear the speeches of Churchill, Spaak, Paul Reynaud, Jacini and Kraft. But in addition a lot was done to prepare future moves and events.

In the months that followed, however, the high hopes began to wane. The Committee of Ministers which met in December 1949 either shelved or turned down the proposals put forward by the Assembly. During the course of 1950 there was some modest progress and the adoption of one important measure, the European Convention on Human Rights and the accompanying Court, which was first mooted within the European Movement. It became apparent, however, that no major progress was possible. Certain of the continental countries – France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg – were willing and ready to go ahead, and so of course was the newly admitted Germany. On the other hand, the British Government was firmly against and was influencing the attitude of the Scandinavians. Nothing could be jointly agreed.

Those who wanted quick progress realized that they would have to act alone. But for France and the Benelux countries, it was a painful and fearful decision to make; they would have to leave aside Great Britain, their war-time ally and friend, and link their fate with Germany and Italy, their former enemies. Moreover, France, Germany and Italy, the major partners in this new adventure were politically unstable. A big question mark hung over their future. Should Britain take the lead the continental countries would gladly follow, accepting any proposal, however far reaching it might be. Alone they were understandably scared.

The Labour Government, the Scandinavian countries and all those who were cool towards the idea professed scepticism, claiming it

would not work, and in any case the people and the governments were not ready for it. And the enthusiasts countered by saying that if proof were given, if the first step were made and seen to work, the pragmatic British would be convinced by the results. Moreover, during the 1950 elections in Britain, the Labour Party was returned with an overall majority of only ten. The Attlee Government was not expected to last for long. The tide of opinion was flowing towards the Conservatives, whose attitude to Europe was radically different. Should they soon return to power, Britain's policy could be expected to change.

Indeed at Strasbourg, the Conservatives sided firmly with the big majority which was in favour of rapid progress. The Conservative delegates, led by Churchill, played a leading part and their speeches promising that things would change once they got to power, as well as all the numerous proposals which they put forward, were enthusiastically received by their continental colleagues. Naturally it only made matters worse for the Labour Party delegates to the Strasbourg Assembly. Their role was to say 'no', damp the enthusiasm and dash the hopes. They were in a most invidious position and resented being under constant attack. This further contributed to confirm their Government in its negative attitude.

But events were pressing. In 1950 the Korean war erupted and the Cold War was hotting up. A clear and convincing path had to be charted for Western Germany. It had to be brought into and firmly anchored in the Western camp which needed its resources, both economic and military. This could only be done within the framework of European Unity.

In May 1950 Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister, put forward a plan, which later took his name, for a European Coal and Steel Community to be administered by a Supranational High Authority. In a limited sector, a first step was to be made towards European Unity. It was a challenge and a wager that at some later stage Britain would join. At the same time, in Strasbourg, Churchill called for the creation of a European Army, under a unified command and with a single Defence Minister, which would include German contingents. He said: 'We should all bear a worthy and honourable part.' It could be reasonably assumed that once the Conservatives came to power Britain would join Europe. Both these proposals were endorsed by the Assembly but while the Schuman offer was accepted by the Benelux countries, Italy and Germany, the European Army, touching as it did the most delicate subject of all, could not proceed without Great Britain.

A year later, at the end of October 1951, the Conservatives finally came to power. Anthony Eden became Foreign Secretary. Like Ernest Bevin, he too dictated the foreign policy of his Government. Moreover, he was Churchill's heir apparent and few people in his Party dared to oppose him in his chosen field of foreign policy. But his heart was not in Europe and he was encouraged in this attitude by the Foreign Office which from the start was cool towards it. Although he went to The Hague Congress he played no part in the Movement. Until he became Foreign Minister he never went to Strasbourg. European Unity was somebody else's baby and he refused to acknowledge its existence. His recently published memoirs give the impression that he was scarcely aware of the historical process developing in Europe.

When he took over the Foreign Office in 1951 Eden put a stop to the Conservative initiatives in Strasbourg. The first to suffer was the proposal for a European Army, the most important of all, first put forward by Churchill a year before. In November Sir David Maxwell Fyfe (later Lord Kilmuir), freshly appointed Home Secretary, read a statement to the Consultative Assembly in Strasbourg explaining that the new Conservative Government viewed with sympathy the possibility of British participation. A few hours later Eden gave a press conference in Rome and declared that this was out of the question. As a result the hopes centred on the Conservatives coming to power were dashed and among Continentals the disappointment was bitter.

What did happen? Why did Churchill, who gave such powerful impetus to the idea of European Unity, suddenly abandoned it when he came back to power? Did he really mean what he said when he was in opposition? Retinger certainly thought so. He wrote:

> 'I had the opportunity of approaching Churchill on many occasions. I can declare most emphatically that at that time he was firmly convinced that the only way of saving Europe, and Britain, from chaos, was the creation of a United Europe in which Britain would be included. He was earnest in his public declarations on this subject, and in private talks he certainly made the most fervent statements on the necessity for European Unity. Even if he was not perhaps the most active leader of the European Movement, he certainly did everything we asked him to do until he became Prime Minister. Sometimes he even went farther than we thought the situation warranted: for instance, in his famous speech at Strasbourg about the necessity for a European Army.'

The refusal of the Conservative Government to have any truck with the European Army was followed by their refusal to join the Coal and Steel Community. In fact the policy of the new government was identical to that of the preceding one. There was now practically no difference between the position of the main parties and as a result, as far as Britain was concerned, there was nothing to be hoped for in the foreseeable future.

The 'Europeans', particularly in Great Britain, were downcast, but the ambiguities of the Government's attitude allowed some hope. Behind the scenes, various attempts were made to lobby the Government into a more positive attitude. Macmillan describes in his memoirs how in January 1952 Retinger came to see him to urge that Britain should cease to be negative and should put forward constructive proposals or at least declare clearly how far it could go.

Macmillan and many others did try but to no avail. The deep-seated reasons for this reluctance to assume what in effect was the leadership of Europe are still unclear. It was often said that British politicians were put off by the federalist and supranational constitutions which the continentals preferred. The fact remains, that at that time, and indeed till the end of the decade, British leaders either did not, or did not wish to understand the dilemma of the continental countries. Should Britain join, the Six would have accepted any loose arrangements. Britain's membership in itself would guarantee against future risks. Without Britain, however, prior firm constitutional arrangements were essential. Supranationalism was a vital safeguard against partners one could not completely trust. Unfortunately, in Britain, throughout the fifties, the desire of the continental countries for supranational guarantees were used as an argument against joining Europe.

In 1951, at the end of the November Session of the Council of Europe, Spaak resigned in protest from the Presidency of the Assembly. He wanted to devote himself to promoting unity among the Six countries who joined in the Schuman plan. This was the area where all the hopes and all the energies of the 'Europeans' were now to concentrate. There lay the possibility of achieving real progress and of developing the nucleus of a United Europe which in time others might join.

The plan for a European Defence Community was to bedevil European politics for the next four years. It was in those days the only acceptable way of letting Germany contribute to Western European defence. And yet without Britain the risks seemed too high and the price to be paid, particularly for France, which would have to surrender sovereignty in the most sensitive field of all, was too great. After many convulsions, in 1955 the project fell through.

And so Britain missed her greatest chance. It is a sad and tragic story. Lord Boothby, who was one of those who fought particularly hard to get Britain into Europe, and who as a result experienced all the bitter disappointments of those days recalls the story with great clarity and perceptiveness in his book of essays and reminiscences. In the few memoirs, as yet published, by those who played a leading part in the events of that period, particularly in those of Harold Macmillan, additional aspects are described in greater detail. It might as yet be too early for the full story to be written, involving as it does today's political controversy. But when one day historians describe it in detail a fascinating story will emerge. Failure to grasp the leadership of Europe, which was persistently offered on a plate for over five years, was by far the most important single factor why Britain, who emerged from the War as one of the three greatest world powers, gradually slid to its present position. And yet the politicians who held power at the decisive time seemed neither incompetent nor in any way inferior; nor can one blame public opinion, which would have supported any strong and courageous lead. Looking back it seems to me that the reason lay in an array of factors, human, political, historical, economic and institutional, each of which played only a small part but whose combined influence was sufficient to ensure inertia. The galling thing is that, given statemanship, each one could have been easily overcome. But then Great Britain never felt the absolute necessity of a United Europe to the same extent as countries on the Continent.

While in 1950 and 1951 all attention was concentrated on the turmoils in Strasbourg, a serious crisis of leadership developed within the European Movement. Although there was no direct connection between the difficulties and problems encountered in either place, in this case as well it affected British participation.

The first murmurs of discontent within the Movement began to be heard by the end of 1948. For all his tremendous energy and ability Duncan Sandys was said to be dictatorial. People who held different

views started to complain and criticism grew in intensity throughout 1949. Sandys was under increasing attack. By 1950 the machinery of the international movement began to get bogged down in sterile discussions. By the middle of the year it was largely paralysed. All along Retinger tried to patch up the trouble, but with little success. He was torn between his friendship and regard for Duncan Sandys and his concern for the organization he had done so much to create. Finally he had to choose. It was painful, difficult and politically dangerous. Never did I admire him more than in those trying days. There is not much point in describing the details of this episode. Suffice it to say that the close friendship with Duncan Sandys, which was dimmed as a result, was restored after a few years.

At the beginning of 1951 the Movement was reorganized and Paul-Henri Spaak took over the Chairmanship. The Secretariat was moved to Brussels and Retinger went to live there, taking me with him.

As a result of the crisis that occurred at the end of 1951, when it became plain that the new Conservative Government was letting Europe down, the Movement began to concentrate all its energies on the six countries who joined in the Schuman Plan for a European Coal and Steel Community. Retinger regretted that the others were being neglected but there was little that could be done about it. The political arguments for such a policy were irrefutable. On the other hand the organization of the Movement in Great Britain virtually faded out of existence. As far as the people on the Continent were concerned, it seemed as if Britain was losing interest. This situation persisted until the end of 1954 when Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens took over the leadership of the Movement in Britain and gradually rebuilt it, this time on a fully all-party basis.

In April 1952 Retinger swopped functions. He retired as Secretary General and assumed the loose title of Delegate General. This relieved him of responsibilities, permitting him still to play a leading part.

Also the struggle to build Europe had now entered into a new and different phase. It now centred on the practical application of ideas previously put forward in the limited but concrete field of economic affairs. The European Coal and Steel Community, the product of the Schuman Plan, was born and pointed the way to future progress. The torch now passed into the hands of men among whom Jean Monnet was to play a leading part.

Economics was never Retinger's strong point. The new political situation and the Movement's policies offered him less scope than before. He preferred the broader field covering the whole of Europe rather than those restricted to the six. Moreover he felt that to play a useful part in promoting Europe, to achieve something worthwhile, he would have to reach higher and wider. Certain ideas about it were already beginning to germinate in his mind. Also he wanted to go back to London.

4

1952 started badly. The Cold War was at its height. Pressure for German rearmament was mounting and was creating tensions and stresses in Europe. The Korean war dragged on, and so did war in Indo-China. While neutralist feelings were spreading in Europe, McCarthyism was growing in the United States. On both sides of the Atlantic there was a good deal of reciprocal mistrust. The newly born Atlantic Alliance and NATO were seriously threatened as a result. A rift between a scared and confused Europe and an America over-confident in its power boded ill for the future. Everything that had been so painfully built up in the West since the War would be adversely affected.

Many people, including Retinger, were concerned about this situation, but could see no solution. What could possibly be done on both sides of the Atlantic at a moment when governments themselves seemed to be drifting apart?

Retinger always believed that public opinion follows the lead of influential individuals. He much preferred working through a few carefully selected people to publicity on a massive scale. Perhaps it would be possible to bring together a group of people, from among the most influential men in their respective fields, and cause them to take an active interest in redressing the situation both in Europe and America. But although few would disagree with this admirable aim, most people would be reluctant to devote much time to something so vague. Any proposal would, therefore, have to be sufficiently attractive and, above all, demonstrate that it was effective.

In the early part of 1952 Retinger consulted some of his friends and in particular Paul van Zeeland and Paul Rykens, who was then Chairman of Unilever. They shared his views and offered some advice. It seemed that the problem was real and serious enough and many people were concerned about it. It affected every country and every party alike. But for that very reason anything that might be done about it could appear suspect should it be identified with any major country or any political party. The principal difficulty was, therefore, to find the right kind of person to play the leading part. Retinger thought about Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, whom he had met briefly during the War and later during the Congress of The Hague. The Prince was interested in politics and supported European Unity. His official position of Prince Consort limited his freedom of action but he was always ready to help good causes. He was universally liked and was popular in America. His support would be invaluable.

And so, in May, Paul Rykens, who had the ear of the Prince, arranged an appointment. During their first meeting, the Prince was sympathetic and intrigued by the project. He wanted to think it over and consult his advisers and friends. Other meetings took place, more people were consulted and soon a small select group of people became involved. In addition to Dr Rykens and Mr van Zeeland it comprised Signor de Gasperi and Ambassador Pietro Quaroni for Italy, Hugh Gaitskell and Sir Colin Gubbins for Great Britain, Antoine Pinay and Guy Mollet for France, Max Brauer, the Mayor of Hamburg, and Rudolf Mueller for Germany, Panajotis Pipinelis for Greece and Ole Bjorn Kraft for Denmark.

The first meeting was arranged in Paris on 25 September 1952. Although de Gasperi could not come, the presence of all the others was more than enough to draw attention and create a stir. Paris under the Fourth Republic – when France was involved in colonial wars and government crises succeeded one another rapidly – lived in an atmosphere of permanent conspiracy and intrigue. However ridiculous it might be everybody had to take it into account and play the part. In our case it was said that should it be known that Mr Pinay was meeting Mr Mollet grave trouble would result for both. But also if anybody asked questions it would be extremely difficult to explain what the meeting was all about and why so many important people were taking part. It was purely exploratory and it was too early to say what the outcome would be. In the circumstances it was thought preferable to keep it all as discreet as possible.

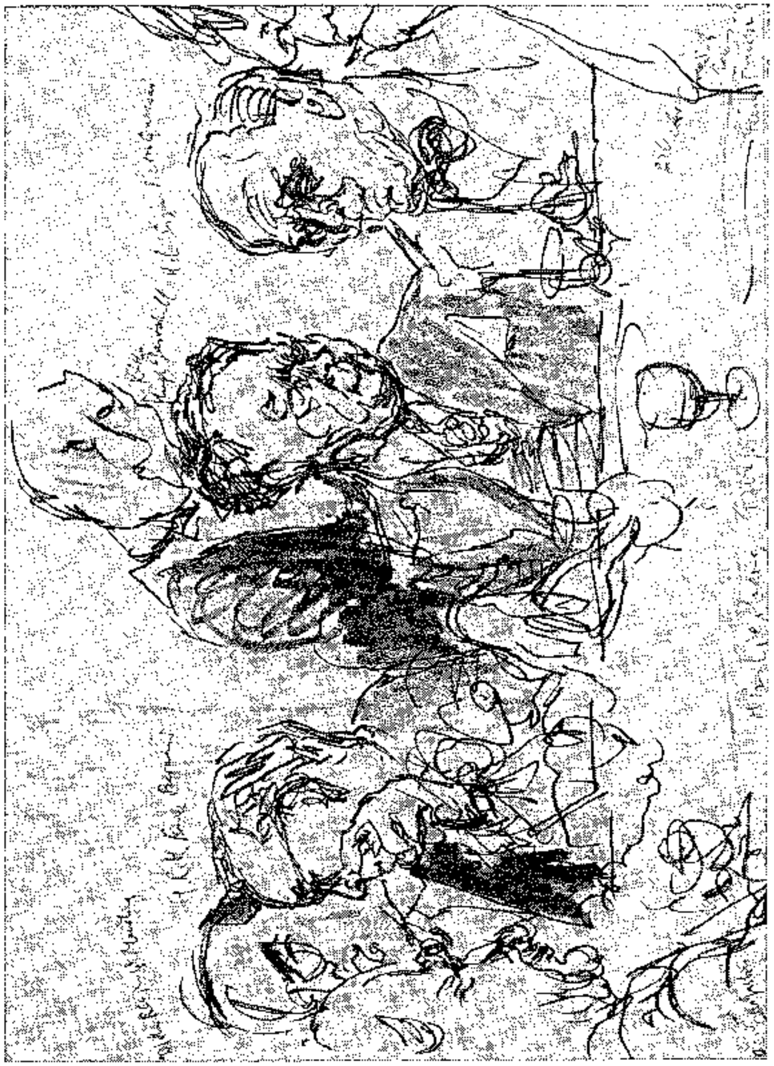
The meeting went very well and everybody agreed that there was an urgent need to do something to improve relations with the United States. The method of doing so would gradually become clearer. In any case it was necessary to have further consultations and establish contacts in the United States. In the meantime more people and more countries should be brought into the circle and papers should be prepared on the feelings and position in each European country. It would set people thinking and might yield interesting results.

Many years later, Ambassador Quaroni, writing on Retinger, described this occasion as follows:

> 'I also recall the first meeting to which I was invited. We were squeezed round a very large table in a tiny room; we agreed on the principle, but did not know how to execute it, how to organize things, whom to turn to, how to find the wherewithal. It was not very clear-cut. Suggestions issued forth from Retinger's mouth like machine gun fire. They were not all excellent, it is true, but when one was refuted, he had ten more up his sleeve. He was probably the only one among us who had really studied the question on both sides of the Atlantic and who had specific ideas on the subject. With his pleasant, old schemer's manners, he persuaded us to accept most of what he wanted.'

The whole of 1953 was spent on further contacts and consultations – there were more meetings – and a couple of visits to the United States. There, things were a little slow to start, mainly because people were absorbed in the Presidential elections. Once these were over everything went smoothly. General Eisenhower, the new President, as well as some of his closest collaborators had a recent experience of Europe and appreciated its problems. Also they knew Prince Bernhard well and held him in high esteem. As a result an American group was quickly brought together under the Chairmanship of the late Mr John Coleman, President of the Burroughs Corporation, assisted by Mr Joseph Johnson, Director of the Carnegie Foundation.

Then in May 1954 the first conference took place in a secluded hotel called the Bilderberg, near Arnhem in Holland. There were about eighty participants, including some twenty Americans. It was a very high-powered gathering of prominent politicians, industrialists, bankers and eminent public figures, writers, trade unionists and scholars. Prince Bernhard, Paul van Zeeland and John Coleman took the Chair in turn. A certain atmosphere of tense expectation, noticeable when people who are gathered together for the first time warily feel their way, was soon dissipated, thanks largely to the charm, easy manner and sense of humour of the Prince. Speakers were only allowed five minutes at a time which



8. The Bilderberg Group in London, 1956, drawn by Feliks Topolski

From left to right: General Sir Colin Gubbins, the Rt. Hon. Reginald Maudling, H.R.H. Prince Bernhard, Rt. Hon. Hugh Gaitskell, Ambassador Pietro Quaroni, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck helped to liven up debates, while the pungent interventions of C. D. Jackson, Denis Healey, Lord Boothby and a few others added bite to the discussions.

In addition to the plenary meetings, meals and drinks were occasions for some of the most interesting, stimulating and often amusing exchanges. After three days of living together in this secluded place, which participants left only once, when Prince Bernhard invited them to cocktails at the Royal Palace nearby, a certain faint but discernible bond was created. A new entity was born. But it was difficult to define what it was. Its purpose, its methods and its structure were new and original. They did not bear any analogy and did not fit into any known category. For the time being, for lack of any better term, it was called the Bilderberg Group after the name of the hotel in which the first meeting took place.

This name has stuck and is still used today. Since the first conference in 1954 many others have been held under the Chairmanship of Prince Bernhard, usually at yearly intervals and each time in a different country, including the United States and Canada. The subjects discussed vary, but always cover the problems which confront the Western countries and which are apt to create friction and divergencies between them. It is perhaps the best forum possible to debate the great issues of the day. It is certainly one of the best informed assemblies, and after a Bilderberg week-end one leaves with a feeling of knowing not only the points of view within the different countries but, what is more important, having had an insight into the inner feelings of the principal actors.

Yet the importance of the Bilderberg Group stems from the people who take part. At each successive meeting, new persons are invited. The circle thus grows larger and never gets stale. Only the inner circle, called the Steering Committee, which is responsible for the preparation of the meetings, remains the same and even there a change of guard occasionally takes place. During the first three or four years the all-important selection of participants was a delicate and difficult task. This was particularly so as regards politicians. It was not easy to persuade top office holders to come. The occasion was interesting and pleasant enough but was it worth a four day foreign journey? Here Retinger displayed great skill and an uncanny ability to pick out people who in a few years time were to accede to the highest offices in their respective countries. In this way after a few years, when the fame of the conferences began to spread, getting people to come was no longer a problem. Rather the opposite was the case. Then the most frequent problem was how to keep them out without creating offence.

After several years the Bilderberg Group could claim an impressive array of statesmen and potentates of all sorts, who at one stage or another have been brought into its circle. No names need be quoted – and indeed the rule was not to – but it would suffice to say that today there are very few key figures among governments on both sides of the Atlantic who have not attended at least one of these meetings. What is perhaps more important is that everyone is flattered to receive an invitation.

The character, the strength and the vitality of any group depends on the growth of a network of personal relations between its members. In the early days Retinger was largely the focus and the intermediary in addition to being the moving spirit of it all. He had plenty of initiative and was full of ideas – sometimes too much so for less adventurous spirits. But also, involved as he was in many affairs, he often had things up his sleeve which were of real or potential advantage to many members of the Group.

Within a few years, however, Prince Bernhard became the true centre of all the loyalties and affective bonds. At first, he had to step warily, establishing precedents and getting to know people, most of whom, by the very nature of things, felt diffident towards their Royal Chairman. Time was needed to build confidence and that intimate mutual understanding necessary for sure-footed management.

To build the whole group around the person of the Prince was a master-stroke on the part of Retinger. Prince Bernhard has great qualities of heart and mind, whose harmonious blend results in an enormous personal charm which few people can resist. Also his position is unique. As a royal prince he naturally takes precedence without arousing anybody's envy. He is politically impartial, while the fact that he represents a small country is also reassuring. There were also many intangible but very real and very great advantages in having a royal prince as Chairman, and to illustrate this it might not be inappropriate to quote from a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta:

> Though men of rank may useless seem,
> They do good in their generation,
> They make the wealthy upstart teem
> With Christian love and self-negation;

The bitterest tongue that ever lashed
Man's folly, drops with milk and honey,
While Scandal hides her head, abashed,
Brought face to face with Rank and Money!

Although taken out of context this little rhyme makes a point which is likely to remain valid for many generations to come.

How useful and effective have the Bilderberg Conferences really been? Much, of course, depended on the circumstances at the time. The meeting held in Florida in February 1957 was, for instance, very much apropos to help heal the bruises after the Suez disaster. Lord Kilmuir, who was then Lord Chancellor, recalls in his memoirs, that having been expressly sent there by the Prime Minister, Mr Macmillan, he found it an immensely useful occasion for talks with high-ranking Americans.

Certainly it created countless extremely helpful contacts between people who bore some of the principal responsibilities for the affairs of their countries both in politics and in economics. Although completely intangible, this is a very important factor in international affairs which sometimes leads to great results. European Unity would not have been possible without an enormous number of personal contacts and confrontations between the political and economic leaders of European countries. There is much less of this between Europe and America and therefore occasions where it takes place are all the more precious.

Moreover, the relationship between the United States and its European partners suffers from a disparity of power, and this is further aggravated by the sheer physical distance between America and Europe. It is a very real factor and whatever the issues of the day might be its influence is constantly felt. Inside Europe, political opinion within a country can be influenced by the views and wishes of other European nations. Governments have to take note of what others think. A good deal of pressure can be brought on a country who is out of step with its partners, and this is almost always effective enough as none is sufficiently strong to disregard others for long. That is why the Common Market or any other European grouping can be made to work.

General de Gaulle was no exception to this rule. It might have seemed as if he could get away with more than anybody else but, in fact, by means of his very skilful diplomacy he managed to bring others round to share his views.

America is in an altogether different position. It towers in the distance, and Europeans, of whatever country, enmeshed as they are in a network of treaties of which America is always the hub, simply feel that they cannot exert the kind of influence nor bring the degree of pressure which their own involvement requires. They can pray, hope and watch but there is not much they can do. Any occasion of talking fully and frankly to top American leaders is particularly useful and important. Hence the very fact that the Bilderberg exists is in itself a factor of some consequence in Atlantic relations.

I remember that, while making a modest start in politics, I tried to explain what to me seemed the most important aspect of some problem to Mr Paul de Auer, an old and experienced Hungarian diplomatist. I must have appeared too intent and gone on for too long. When I finished, Mr de Auer wearily waved his hand and said: 'Monsieur Pomian, in politics those things are important which important people think are important.' By this simple rule the Bilderberg Group is certainly important.

Since the first meeting in Paris in 1952, a slight air of mystery has surrounded the Bilderberg Group. Neither what was said, nor who the participants were, was ever divulged to the Press. Publicity was shunned. Sometimes this contributed to stir curiosity and imagination, sometimes to spread fame, sometimes to spread stories. On many occasions it gave rise to a great variety of amusing incidents.

An innocent one occurred in July 1956. Till then no Turks had participated in the meetings. This gap had to be repaired and Prince Bernhard, who was on good terms with Prime Minister Menderes, agreed to introduce Retinger to explain what was wanted. For a variety of reasons the meeting could not be arranged until one day, Prince Bernhard, who was leaving on an African safari, rang up. He had just spoken about it to the Turkish Minister at The Hague and an appointment had been fixed in Turkey in a fortnight's time. The line was bad and Retinger was not sure whether he had understood everything correctly. And so, on our way to Istanbul we passed through The Hague to check the arrangements and also to discover how much the Turks knew about the purpose of the visit. The Turkish Minister was most helpful and had organized everything very well, but although he seemed very impressed with the importance of the mission he knew little of what it was about or who on earth Retinger was. On one or two occasions he addressed Retinger as Professor, instead of his usual title of Doctor, but this seemed irrelevant.

In Istanbul, where we arrived the same day, an impressive welcome awaited us, and here again everybody addressed Retinger as Professor. The same thing happened in Ankara, where Retinger first called on the Foreign Minister. All our Turkish hosts were so hospitable and so deferential towards Retinger that we let pass this slip which, after all, seemed perfectly inconsequential. The talk with the Foreign Minister took a good half-hour longer than scheduled. We emerged from it to be greeted by our guide, a pleasant young man from the Protocol Department, who, with a worried look announced that we must hurry as we were late for our next appointment. This was news to us as none had been expected. It turned out that our hosts thought it would please Retinger, who was in Turkey for the first time, to meet his colleagues . . . other Professors at the University. It was too late to retract. We could not explain that it was all a mistake. Too many people to whom we were indebted for a most hospitable reception would be embarrassed. We set off exchanging worried glances.

At the University we were greeted by the Dean of the Faculty of Law and Economics, accompanied by some twenty professors. Drinks were served and an animated conversation started. Retinger was particularly voluble and I, too, tried to second him as best I could. Our sole aim was not to let any of our hosts ask from which university Professor Retinger came. That would have been awful, for everybody would have lost face. Happily we stood our ground for a good three-quarters of an hour. Suddenly, lunch was announced; but that was too much. We could face it no longer. Retinger pleaded some previous engagement and, exhausted, we beat a hasty retreat to the bar of our hotel where the biggest whiskies were promptly ordered!

Otherwise the visit to Turkey proved very successful, largely thanks to the help and understanding of a very able diplomatist, Ambassador Nuri Birgi who, at that time, was Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry. Two years later the Turks played host to a Bilderberg Conference in a secluded hotel on the magical shores of the Bosphorus.

Although the Bilderberg Group was mainly concerned with problems facing the Atlantic Alliance, Retinger remained, as before, primarily attached to European Unity. His views did not change nor did his involvement get less. His field of action grew wider and as a result he could do more in European affairs. Unfortunately the opportunities to do so were now fewer. Progress in Europe was limited to the Six and all efforts were concentrated on this area. The failure of the European Defence Community in 1955 was followed by the Messina Conference which gave birth to the Common Market. Again Britain refused to join. Instead, seeing the results, she took the initiative of forming the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) grouping the Scandinavian countries, Austria, Switzerland and Portugal who were like-minded in their attitude to European unification. Then followed an attempt to join the two together. It threatened the purpose and existence of the newly formed Common Market and General de Gaulle, who by then had come to power in France, objected. At the same time he firmly set his face against any further extension of the supranational principle. The next phase was to be 'L'Europe des Patries' which at the same time was the Europe of Governments.

The Bilderberg Group was, naturally, a great political asset for Retinger. Thanks to it he could intervene and help most effectively in many matters. Many of his friends sought his advice and, since he never refused to help, he participated in the organizing and developing of many undertakings. They all had to do either with 'Europe' or the 'Atlantic'. Among these the European Cultural Foundation and the Atlantic Congress loomed larger as far as time and effort were concerned.

There were also many things he launched himself. One of them had to do with Asia. He sought to find a way of establishing a dialogue between the West and the East, in which philosophers, theologians and political thinkers would take part. Much time and effort was spent on it and many people became involved. The brilliant book *L'Aventure Occidentale de l'Homme* by his friend Denis de Rougemont, who participated in it all, will long remain as a lone monument connected with this venture. Otherwise it came to nothing.

Then there was also Eastern Europe. After the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, it seemed that a wind of change was beginning to blow throughout the Soviet bloc. Perhaps the evolution might even go far enough for the Bilderberg experience to become relevant to East–West relations. Retinger always liked to proceed empirically and gradually test the ground. In this case it would take a long time and in the meantime he needed to build up his own personal renown. For the first time in his life he felt in need of some publicity for himself. He needed to be noticed and be in a position to impress people in the Eastern bloc. The Nobel Peace prize occurred to him as the best way to do so and some of his friends began to canvass support. But right at that time priests rather than politicians were getting all the prizes and nothing came of it. Earlier on, in 1956, a letter he wrote to Mr Cyrankiewicz, the then Polish Prime Minister, whom he knew of old, asking for a visa to Poland, remained unanswered. Altogether, in the late fifties, any moves in the direction of Eastern Europe were, in fact, premature. I like to think that in this case as in so many others he anticipated the course of events.

All along Retinger worked closely with Prince Bernhard, to whom he was very deeply devoted. He served his prince faithfully and unsparingly as a kind of self-appointed political courtier, and in turn the Prince was always a most loyal and faithful friend and ally.

In 1957 his health began to decline. It worried him but he did little about it. When he finally retired at the end of 1959 his health was very poor. Yet until a few weeks before he died, on the 12 June 1960, he was still active. Although he no longer had any responsibilities he never ceased making plans with regard to the various causes that were dear to his heart. There was a sharp decline during his last few weeks but even that had no visible effect on his good humour or his interest in men and problems. He was heard in confession and received the last sacraments. In his last months he certainly felt that he had fulfilled his task and had done what he had set out to do except to complete his memoirs. This book might, perhaps, help to fill that gap.

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